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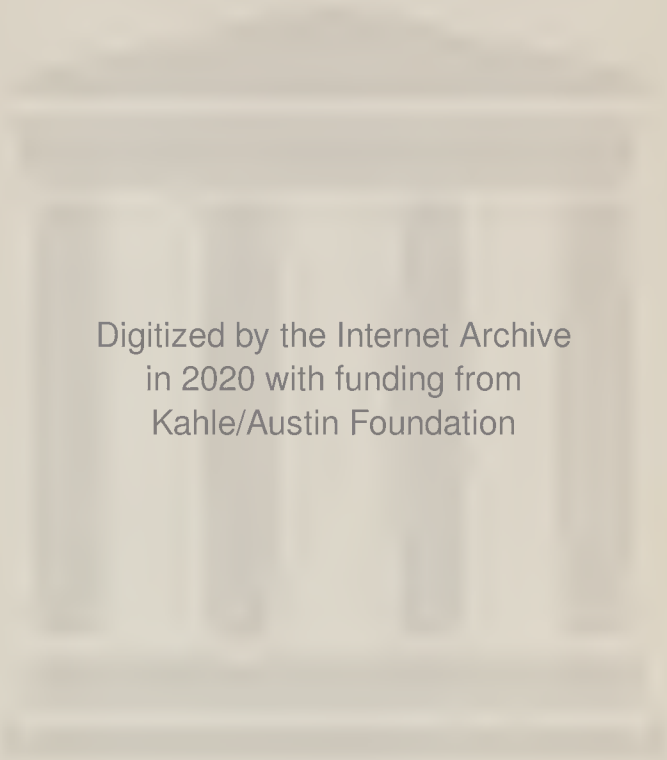
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De Balzac

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

BY

FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE

of the French Academy

AUTHOR OF

A Manual of the History of French Literature

FRENCH MEN OF LETTERS

EDITED BY

ALEXANDER JESSUP, LITT.D.



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PREFACE

If it be true of Molière that he was not only the greatest of comic authors, but "comedy" itself, it may be said of Balzac that he was not only the greatest, the most fertile and diverse of our novelists, but the "novel" itself; and the object of the present volume is to show that in saying this I say nothing but the absolute and exact truth. For this reason the reader is requested not to seek in the following pages a biography of Honoré de Balzac, or what to-day goes by that name—information about his origin, anecdotes of his college days, the tittle-tattle of his love-affairs, and the tedious narrative of his quarrels with newspapers or publishers—but solely a study of his work: a study in which, of course, I do not refrain from speaking, when necessary, of the man and of the romance of his life, but wherein I wish especially to define, to explain, and to characterise his work—which, in my opinion, would remain the same if Balzac, instead of being born in Tours, had been born, for instance, in Castelnaudary, and if, in place of studying law, he had studied medicine.

In order to define it: I first applied myself to show in what way Balzac's novels differed from all which preceded them, and how, by what qualities, or, if you like, by what defects, the imitation of Balzac had, for fifty years, imposed itself upon all the novelists who came after him. I have not, indeed, expressed in this connection my own preferences, nor attempted to assign ranks; I put Balzac neither above nor below anybody; but it is a fact that for the last fifty years a good novel has been a novel which first of all resembles a novel of Balzac, just as for a hundred and fifty years a good comedy was one which resembled a comedy of Molière; and I have endeavoured to give reasons for this fact. It is clear, then, that the intrinsic value of Balzac's novels cannot be foreign to this fact, nor to the reasons therefor.

In the second place, to bring this value into the light: I have not feigned ignorance of what others may already have said of the Balzac novel; on the contrary, I have striven to make this study not a simple abstract or a mere discussion, but, as it were, to "bring to a focus" the critical judgments of the great novelist's work. And, indeed—may I be allowed to remark?—I know of nothing more impertinent than that method at present in

vogue, which consists in treating whatever subject is treated as if nobody before had considered it, understood anything at all about it, or said of it anything but what was perfectly negligible, whereas, on the contrary, nothing is negligible in criticism, any more than in history; and the judgments that have been passed, before us, on a Balzac or a Molière have literally become "incorporated" with their work in such a way that they can be detached from it only at the expense of the significance of that work.

Lastly, and to complete my characterisation of Balzac's work: I have attempted to show that a part, and not the least part, of Balzac's genius lies in his realisation that the novel in his time was not an established form standing independently among other forms, like the tale of adventure or the comedy of manners; and that to renew it, or, more truly, to create it, he had only, by fixing its limitations, to assure it this independence, this "autonomy". I am not sure that at present there is such a thing as a "hierarchy" of forms. But that literary forms exist; that they have definite characteristics; that these characteristics evolve; and that, like the characteristics of species in natural history, they express or realise themselves in the process of evolution, with more or less

success, or power, or precision, according to circumstances—of this I am certain; and I trust that the proof of it may be found in this volume.

This I believed to be the best thing I could do in writing these pages on Balzac. A work like his—I mean, a work of such amplitude and solidity—may have been dependent in his own time, but is no longer dependent to-day, on the circumstances of its production. What do we know of the life of Shakespeare, and of the circumstances attendant on the production of *Hamlet* or *Othello?* If these circumstances were better known to us, will any one believe or seriously say that our admiration for either drama would thereby be increased? Would it be increased if the character of the Moor of Venice were a "portrait", or if Shakespeare had portrayed himself under the features of the Prince of Denmark? So with Balzac, and although scarcely fifty years separate us from him. His work exists "in itself", if I may so express it, and consequently apart from him. That is why he is Balzac. If he were not Balzac, I might perhaps have attempted to write his biography. Very mediocre writers have sometimes had very interesting lives, and in narrating their lives the mediocrity of their work is forgotten. But, in truth, I

should have thought that I was wronging the memory of Balzac in treating him as if his name had been Jules Sandeau or Charles de Bernard; and I should have thought that I failed to fulfil the first obligation of the critic or historian of literature in speaking of the man more and otherwise than was necessary for the clear comprehension of his work.

FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE.

EDITORIAL NOTE

This book, while written expressly for this series, was written in French. The translation into English has been made by Robert Louis Sanderson, M. A., Assistant Professor of French in Yale University.

Titles of literary works are given in both their English and their foreign form the first time each occurs, except where these are identical.

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HONORÉ DE BALZAC

CHAPTER I

THE MODERN NOVEL BEFORE BALZAC

When young Honoré de Balzac, in 1819, after having completed his studies, bravely began, in a narrow garret of the Rue Lesdiguières, his apprenticeship to literary life, without any more precise or imperative vocation than that of making himself a name by means of his pen and a fortune by means of his name, two forms of novel shared public favour: these were the personal novel and the historical novel.

The immediate origin of the personal novel —I say "immediate", for the reader does not expect me to go back to the *Odyssey*—dated, in European literature, from the *Gil Blas* of Le Sage; and, farther back than Le Sage, from that Spanish vein of the picaresque novel which opened with *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1556) and was exhausted with *Marcos de Obregon* (1618). It consists essentially in the relation of adventures of which the narrator begins by being the hero, and the object of these adventures is not so much to bring to light his

qualities or virtues as to recount the purpose of a human life and the more or less singular fortune of a private condition. "History," it has been said in our day—and this saying has more than the usual import given to it by the brothers De Goncourt, who expressed it—"is a novel which has been; a novel is history which might have been."

Nowhere does one realise this better than in the *Gil Blas* of Le Sage, unless it be in the *Memoirs of D'Artagnan* (*Mémoires de D'Artagnan*), by Courtilz de Sandras, one of his contemporaries. Let every one have his due, and let us give this poor forgotten wretch the credit of having invented the famous characters of Athos, Aramis, and Porthos. But what Courtilz de Sandras—who, after all, is not worth reading, while Le Sage is one of our excellent writers—did not see was that exceedingly particular or extraordinary adventures, which interest us by reason of their very singularity, interest us only once, and we quickly forget them. They make no impression on us, and they form no part of the lessons taught by experience. Our knowledge of common life is not increased thereby. For it is increased only by the narrative of adventures which might have been ours, and, as this is precisely what we cannot say of those of D'Artagnan or Lazarillo

de Tormes, this reason explains the superiority of *Gil Blas*. The picaresque novel may have other merits, and I admit that it has. There is more characterisation of manners; there is a more pronounced local colour; all Spain is presented to our curiosity, the Spain of Charles V. and Philip II. But Le Sage's *Gil Blas* comes nearer the definition of the novel, and perhaps it would have realised it then, as early as 1715, had not two things continually turned it aside: the comic or satirical intention, and the pretension to style. The author of *Gil Blas* never forgot that he was also the author of *Turcaret;* and seeing himself compelled, moreover, by his need of money, to perform a task which was only half to his taste, he wished at least to prove that, had the gods permitted, he could have done something better, or at least different. Le Sage, while sometimes copying life, thought less of copying it than of rivalling the authors of *The Characters* (*Les Caractères*) and *Tartufe*.

However this may be, the novel, for some fifty years after the author of *Gil Blas*, followed in his footsteps; and both in France and in England, where already some of its masterpieces were being prepared, assumed almost universally the form of the personal narrative: *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Gulliver's Travels* (1727),

Manon Lescaut (1732), *Marianne* (1735), and generally all the novels of Marivaux and Abbé Prévost are personal narratives. "I was there; such a thing happened to me." However different they may be in all other respects, these novels all resemble one another in this one point, that the heroes of the adventures relate in them their own lives; and there can be no doubt, besides, that in the evolution of the form this partiality for the form of the personal narrative is due to the intention of making the novel more conformable to reality. These narrators of their own lives are like so many "witnesses" of their time, giving evidence. Their word authenticates the story of their adventures. One might perhaps argue with Abbé Prévost, carp at or question some detail; but how can we contradict Marianne, Marivaux's Marianne, or the Chevalier Des Grieux? And could any one know their own experiences so exactly as themselves? It is thus that by the medium of personal narrative there is introduced into the novel a tone of reality which brings it nearer still to its definition. By trying to impart to it that kind of interest which pleased in memoirs, the personal novel was given something of a realistic nature, which is sometimes all that is to be found in memoirs themselves, and which is

sufficient to make us read them. It matters not how history be written; we take pleasure in it because it is history.

The success of the "novel in letters"—after the model of *Clarissa Harlowe* (1748), or *The New Heloise* (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*) (1762)—neither interrupted nor checked the vogue of the personal novel; but, on the contrary, it may be said, indeed it must be said, that its success contributed only to encourage that vogue. And, in truth, if "correspondence" is, so to speak, nothing else but a mutual diary, and is therefore, also, only a form of "confession", or, at all events, of "confidence", it will be seen how the novel in letters continues and extends the form of the personal narrative by broadening and diversifying it. It is herself, and no other, whom Clarissa Harlowe analyses, as Marianne did; and Saint-Preux differs from the Chevalier Des Grieux only in this, that he "anatomises" himself with more complacency.

Only, and for the reason that the more complacently we anatomise ourselves, the greater originality do we discover in ourselves, the novel in letters, while continuing the personal novel, turns it aside from its object by turning it aside from the representation of common life, to direct it towards psychological analysis.

Let us recall, in this connection, the opening of Rousseau's *Confessions*. He, Rousseau, claims to be made as no one else is. That is why, in *The New Heloise*, and soon in *Werther* (1774), as also in *Dangerous Liaisons* (*Les Liaisons dangereuses*), the writer is coming to emphasise in how many ways one man may differ from another man, one woman from another woman; and the personal novel will thus become the representation of exceptional cases. Henceforth each one will look within himself, and will find matter for observation only in himself. Whatever he may seem to have in common with other men he will leave out; and he will retain only what he considers his own particular, or, rather, unique attribute. He will write only to make known this unique something. And that our originality, whatever notion we may have of it, is never so rare or so complete as we would have it, is the explanation of whatever element of revolt, of personal pride, we find coming into the personal narrative. "That is my history, and since it is such, as doubtless it is unlike that of any one else, do you not understand the esteem in which I hold myself? But how much more original this history would have been if I could have developed more freely, that is to say, in a world in which convention-

alities would not be a constant and perpetual obstacle to the free expansion of the ego!" This becomes, in turn, the key-note of *Werther* (1774), *René* (1802), *Delphine* (1802), *Corinne* (1807), *Adolphe* (1816), *Indiana* (1831), and *Valentine* (1832), and of Amaury in *Soul's Delight* (*Volupté*) (1833); and, under the influence of romanticism, the personal novel will become the apotheosis of the ego.

We know that "romanticism" consists essentially in this apotheosis. We also know that, without going as far as apotheosis, exaltation of the individual by himself is, at all times, the principle of "lyricism". This accounts for the universally lyrical character of romantic literature, in England as well as in France, in Italy as in Germany. But it also accounts for the departure from the personal novel; and it explains how—with what an evenly proportioned swing—it approached between 1715 and 1760 the definite form of the novel, and between 1760 and 1820 departed from that form.

Fortunately, of the two great writers—not always uniformly good—who became the masters of literature under the Consulate, one, the author of *Delphine*, is also the author of *Corinne;* and, whatever may be the importance of *René* in the work of the other, *The*

Martyrs (*Les Martyrs*) has no lesser importance. *Corinne* and *The Martyrs!* Nothing could be more out of fashion, and, especially, nothing could be more colourless in the history of modern literatures. And yet! Yet, without mentioning that even in our day not a novel of Italian life is written but proceeds in some way from *Corinne*, and that when millions of readers read with avidity a novel after the pattern of *Quo Vadis?* they are reading a work after Chateaubriand's *The Martyrs*, scarcely less hackneyed, or hackneyed in a different way, after the manner of 1895 instead of that of 1809—those famous books contained two things sufficient to countervail what, in another way, was too personal in them: they contained the sense of the exotic, and that of history. This was perfectly discerned by a Scotchman, Walter Scott, whom the new criticism, in general, treats rather slightingly, and, I may add, rather unjustly. For this criticism cannot alter the fact that his part in the evolution of the modern novel was considerable, and it was precisely Balzac, as I shall have to show, who saw this better than any one else. Those who have been astonished at this—as Émile Zola was—have no sense of history, and a novelist may certainly be allowed to have no sense of history;

but it would be unpardonable in the historian of literature to forget the part played by Walter Scott and the historical romance in the evolution of the novel.

It was not at all that historical novels were lacking or scarce before Walter Scott; and, to say nothing of those of La Calprenède, after the manner of his *Cleopatra* (*Cléopâtre*) or his *Pharamond*, I have just pointed out how much of the historical there was in novels like the *Gil Blas* of Le Sage, and even in those *Memoirs of a Man of Quality* (*Mémoires d'un Homme de Qualité*), by Abbé Prévost, of which, as we know, *Manon Lescaut* forms only an episode. Women especially, Madame de La Fayette in the seventeenth century, with *Zayde* and *The Princess of Cleves* (*La Princesse de Clèves*), and in the eighteenth century Mademoiselle de La Force, Madame de Fontaine, Madame de Tencin, and Mademoiselle de Lussan, had tried their hand at this form of novel. But, whether men or women novelists, their object had been only to "popularise" or to "make romantic" the data of history, even when they had not made use of history as an easy pretext to spare themselves the labour of invention. Add to this that everything is to be found in history, and that, all that is found there being historical or real, one may conveniently set at

defiance, from the depth of an old "chronicle", the reproach of improbability! Inversely or conversely, when one has a taste for the improbable, or simply the romantic, one has only to assign it its place in history; hence the many apocryphal memoirs and untrustworthy anecdotes with which modern literatures are nearly all crammed. But if the sense of history consists in the perception of differences which distinguish epochs, in the thorough knowledge of characteristic detail, and especially in the knowledge of the bearing of "manners" upon customs, usages, and laws, it may be truly said that this is what novelists before Walter Scott, and historians themselves, did not possess before Chateaubriand.

This will be better understood if we go back to the *Letters on French History* (*Lettres sur l'Histoire de France*) (1820–1825) of Augustin Thierry, and if we read over the reasons for his unchanging admiration for Chateaubriand and Walter Scott, for the author of *The Martyrs* —not of *Atala* or *René*—and for the writer of *Ivanhoe*. These reasons are the same, and they are all reduced to this one: that these men were the first to realise this very simple point, that the feelings or ideas of a contemporary of Louis XIV. differed in several respects from the ideas or feelings of a con-

temporary of Dagobert or Chilperic. And, indeed, I am obliged to repeat that it does not appear to have been surmised before them. "Local colour"—of which such an abuse was to be made—is a literary acquisition of romanticism; and, leaving aside the question of knowing what advantage history or the stage has finally derived therefrom, it cannot be denied that the pursuit of local colour has marked a conjuncture or a principal phase in the evolution of the novel.

For what influences had heretofore withheld the novel from undertaking the exact representation of life? There was, to begin with, the aristocratic character of literature. The dignity of literary styles was measured by the tragic ideal, and it was believed—wrongly, however—that the first requisite of tragedy was the royal or sovereign condition of its characters. But, above all, and owing to this, certain details were considered vulgar, the literary transcription of which was looked upon as unworthy the artist, and with which, moreover, it was thought that the reader was so familiar that they could appear only tedious to him. And these were precisely the details which we consider most expressive of life—furniture, dress, the usages of daily life, the manner of eating, or of enjoying oneself.

Let me dwell a little on this point, which perhaps has some importance, since it is a question of nothing less than the introduction into the novel of the full sense of reality. If we purpose to copy life faithfully, we certainly shall not deny that it contains noble phases and vulgar or base phases, but we recognise that no detail is "despicable", nor especially "useless", which can contribute to give us, in whatever way, the sensation of life. This was precisely what was to be seen in Walter Scott's novels, and it was just the kind of detail that was liked. But if this be so, how and why and by what strange contradiction is it that details which seemed essential for the resurrection of the past should be useless for the representation of the time in which we are living? "Dress," it is said, "does not make the man"; and this is a question which would bear examining. Under the heavy equipment of a high baron of the Middle Ages a warrior is not the same man as an elegant marquis at Fontenoy. And are not manners and characters influenced by "custom", if not by "costume"?

If, then, it is fitting that Art devote herself to the representation only of that which is most general or most universal in these customs, and if only thus, by eliminating the

specific, is the type to be realised—well, if Art so please, she is assuredly within her rights: the right of Greek sculpture, of Italian painting, of the classic French theatre! But she may also choose to devote herself only to the specific; and why should the recording of detail be counted less æsthetic than its elimination? This will depend, in the first place, on the form to be treated and on the method of treatment. Or, in other words, Art has the right of representation over all life, and life is life in its beauty, its sublimity, its intensity, but also—and why not?—in its complexity, its diversity, and its vulgarity! And if these vulgar details are precisely the ones which can, and which alone can, restore the past by bringing out its characteristic features, they are not then so "vulgar" as they have been believed to be; the very word "vulgarity" will have to assume a sense which it did not have; it will become synonymous with a kind of more humble or innermost truth; and, above all, what was an element of life in the past will not become one of insignificance in the present.

This is what the modern novel was to learn from the school of the historical novel; and, at the same time, this may serve to assign a place in literary history to a form which hitherto, apparently, has been ill determined by criticism.

The historical novel properly so called, after the manner of Walter Scott—the novel whose models or masterpieces are *Ivanhoe*, *Quentin Durward*, *The Abbot*, *The Monastery*, *Rob Roy*, or Manzoni's *The Betrothed* (*I Promessi Sposi*), or, again, Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last of the Barons* and Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*—that novel is necessarily, and could only be, a transitory form. Its function has been not so much to prepare the advent of the realistic novel as to unravel and determine its attributes. The historical novel having no other legitimate means of its own to attract and hold the reader's interest than its literal imitation of the past, if I may so speak, and a scrupulous exactness which might be compared to that of the painters of the Dutch school, it forced, as it were, by a return-shock, this scrupulosity upon the representation of contemporary reality, and made of this literal imitation a sort of law of the form. It revived what formerly was lifelike; and what is lifelike to-day is therefore what will endure in the future. Such is the lesson to be drawn from the historical novel, and that is why the success of Walter Scott could not last. In literary history, as in nature, there are kinds or species whose fortune or very existence is linked to circumstances, at a precise moment of their evolution, and which

die of their success. They cannot be revived; the stream will not flow back to its source; the historical novel is not a fixed species of its kind. But it has had its hour and function, and that hour, if I may so speak, lasted fifteen or twenty years in France; and it was during those fifteen or twenty years that the definition of the novel was realised in the work of Honoré de Balzac.

However, it is neither with real "historical novels" nor with "personal novels" that the ambitious youth began his career, in spite of examples; nor was it with those novels which may be called "Balzacian", since he himself excluded them from his work. And one ought also to cross out from the catalogue of his novels *The Inheritress De Birague* (*L'Héritière de Birague*) (1822), *The Vicar of Ardennes* (*Le Vicaire des Ardennes*) (1822), *Argow the Pirate* (*Argow le Pirate*) (1824), and *Paleface Jane* (*Jane la Pâle*) (1825), were it not that these fantastic stories throw some light both on the origin of Balzac's talent and on a too much forgotten element in the evolution of the modern novel. This has been very well shown, in a recent and excellent study, by one of his biographers or critics, M. André Le Breton, with whom I shall quarrel only on one point, and that is for having given the

name of "popular novel" to a form of novel contemporary with the melodrama of Guilbert de Pixérécourt, which has nothing really "popular" about it, except that it is not literary—and perhaps that is not sufficient. It has not been proved, at all events, that what is not literary is, for that reason alone, popular; and if I think fit to mention this point, it is not from any fear that in assigning to Balzac's novels a popular origin I shall be wanting in respect towards him, nor from any wish to flatter the pretensions of Democracy by distinguishing the "popular" from the "anti-literary". But we must agree as to the meaning of words, and the term "popular", which expresses very imperfectly the character of the novels of Ducray-Duminil or Pigault-Lebrun—*Victor or the Child of the Forest* (*Victor ou l'Enfant de la Forêt*), *Monsieur Botte*, *Uncle Thomas* (*Mon Oncle Thomas*)—expresses no better the nature of Balzac's indebtedness to these forgotten predecessors.

Whether that form of novel whose essential characteristics are complication of plot, atrociousness of events, and a kind of vibration or tremolo of style proceeds in France from the English school of Lewis, the author of *The Monk* (1797), Ann Radcliffe, the author of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1797), and Father

Maturin, the author of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, I shall not inquire. I do not believe, moreover, with certain historians of literature, that this "liking for the atrocious" has been encouraged or developed by the events of the French Revolution. To believe this, one must have left unread the long novels of Prévost, his *Cléveland*, which is of 1734, and his *Dean of Killerine* (*Le Doyen de Killerine*), which dates from 1736. It must also be that one does not know, or has forgotten, the history of the Théâtre Français, and what shocking things—when even Corneille's and Racine's tragedies, *Rodogune* or *Iphigenia* (*Iphigénie*), are reduced to the main points of their plot—delighted for two hundred years the imaginations of our fathers. *Atreus and Thyestes* (*Atrée et Thyeste*) and *Rhadamistus and Zenobia* (*Rhadamiste et Zénobie*) should also be mentioned. Shakespeare's and Dryden's plays are certainly just as abounding in bloody incidents. Wherefore I conclude that a "liking for the atrocious" is, unfortunately, an inherent characteristic of human nature; and I have often thought that when Aristotle admired tragedy for "purifying the passions", he meant to praise it for cheating our ferocious instincts. The melodramas of Guilbert de Pixérécourt and the novels of Ducray-Duminil have therefore, in this respect,

introduced nothing new; and the reason of their success must be sought elsewhere.

I find it in the exceedingly naïve and, at the same time, extremely complicated character of the plot; I find it, further, in the allowance which the dramatist or the novelist, if he be not too inexperienced in his art, always takes good care to make for the intervention of chance or fortune; and, finally, I find it in the infectious sincerity of emotion which the author himself feels in the presence of his work. The question which presents itself is to know what the critic is to think of the justifiableness of these means.

> *"Si vis me flere dolendum est*
> *Primum ipsi tibi"*

is one of Horace's opinions, and Boileau appropriated it in this line:

> *"Pour me tirer des pleurs il faut que vous pleuriez"*;

but nothing is more contrary to the practice of classical art, as a rule; and I could easily show that no trace of this personal emotion of the author is to be found, before Voltaire and Prévost, before *Zaïre* and *Cléveland*, in the history of the French drama or novel. To which side does the author of *Andromache* (*Andromaque*) incline, to the side of Pyrrhus

or to that of Orestes, to Hermione's or to Andromache's? And to which side does even the author of *The Misanthrope* (*Le Misanthrope*) incline, to Philinte's or to Alceste's? Towards Célimène's, I shall make bold to inquire, or towards Éliante's? A classic "takes sides" only when the laws of the form oblige him to do so, as Molière did in *The Miser* (*L'Avare*) or in *Tartufe*, which would no longer have any *raison d'être* if they were not satires, and therefore an unquestionable derision of avarice and hypocrisy; or when the moral data of the subject absolutely require it, as with Racine in *Phœdra* (*Phèdre*) or in *Britannicus*. Ernest Renan was almost the only one known to lean towards Nero, and Renan did not write for the stage.

As for the intervention of chance in the plot, it always is, in the eyes of the great classicists, the very negation of art. But it is, none the less, a very powerful motive of action, and one of the most copious sources of the "pathetic". Prévost, in his lengthy novels, and even in *Manon Lescaut*, made the most clever use of it; and how successfully, we know by the evidence of that love-sick woman, Julie de Lespinasse. And, indeed, chance does play its part in human affairs! It has therefore, also, a right to play it in literature. I

would even inquire, in this connection, whether the term "romantic" is not another and more literary name for chance; for what is "necessary" is seldom romantic. Doubtless a novel is, and ought to be, something besides, but it is, in the first place, an account of events which might not have happened. It will not be a very good one if it is that and nothing else; but it must be that! *Gil Blas* is that; so is *Manon Lescaut;* so is *Clarissa Harlowe;* so is *Old Goriot* (*Le Père Goriot*).

And as to complication of plot, I shall not content myself with saying that it is a powerful means of keeping up the reader's interest, but shall say that it is the principal means. Let us not be over-fastidious, and pride ourselves on a silly dilettanteism! There is hardly a novel without a "plot", and there is no plot without some complication of events. Let not *Adolphe* or *René*, or especially *Obermann*, be opposed as an objection thereto. *Adolphe* and *René* are not novels: *René* is a poem, and *Adolphe* is only an "analytical study". But *Delphine*, *Corinne*, *Indiana*, and *Valentine* are novels, because a plot gives unity to each one. And, moreover, it is possible that this plot may be weak, that the incidents are not sufficiently unexpected, that the dénouement, on the con-

trary, is quite expected; but it is a plot, and without this plot there would remain of these four unequally celebrated novels only an impassioned claim of woman's right to independence and love.

I will say it at once: it is here that Balzac profited by his apprenticeship to the so-called "popular" novel and by his own early attempts. In writing *The Vicar of Ardennes*, or *Argow the Pirate*, he realised somewhat indistinctly that, however original may have been the "models" discovered by his observation or conceived by his imagination; whatever may have been the psychological singularity of the "cases of conscience" or of passion which the moving spectacle of life could offer to his curiosity; whatever side of contemporary manners he intended to bring out, and whatever moral or social point he wished to maintain; whatever prejudices or conventionalities he purposed to attack and, if he could, to destroy; and, finally, whatever talent for expression and style he may have felt in himself and been eager to give proof of—there must be a "knot" in a novel, and this knot could be no other than that of a plot. It is necessary that in a novel "something take place", and that on this something one or several human destinies depend. One must pos-

sess the art of interesting the reader in this "something"; and we shall discuss afterwards whether our emotion is justifiable, we shall examine the quality of the means used by the author to interest us, we shall accept them or reject them, we shall judge whether they are too ordinary or too improbable; but the novelist must "interest" us, and he can do so only by relating to us "adventures". This is what so many novelists since Balzac have forgotten, and this—to state the point more precisely—besides, that there can be no "adventure" without the risk of fortune, of happiness, of honour, or of life. Possibly Balzac himself did not always remember this.

For the present, it is sufficient for us to have seen what particular stage the novel, and especially the French novel, had reached when Balzac began to write. Let us add that at this date no writer of recognised repute stood in the way of his youthful ambition, and that he had an open field before him. From a literary point of view, the novel was considered an "inferior" form; and indeed, in France, throughout the entire course of the classical age, not a single writer of note had thought of the novel as a means of attaining fame. If, in the past, some esteem was accorded the author of *Gil Blas*, it was as a

satirist; *Manon Lescaut* was very far from occupying the place which we have since assigned it; and the author of *Cléveland* and *The Dean of Killerine*, who was much read, was classed, in the history of literature, as but a needy workman of letters. *Dangerous Liaisons* had not yet seen the light. If an exception was made in favour of the author of *The New Heloise*, it was because he was Rousseau, the author of the rest of his work; and *The New Heloise* was remembered only for its dissertations of a moral, political, or social character which afforded food for discussion. A characteristic symptom and an eloquent proof of the slight esteem in which the novel was held appear in this one fact: not one novelist as such, in his capacity of novelist only, belonged, or, since 1635, had belonged, to the French Academy. Jules Sandeau was the first! and, if I be not mistaken—not before 1862—Octave Feuillet was the second. This sufficiently indicates what an impetus the novel—like our French comedy before Molière, or the English drama before Shakespeare—was awaiting from him who would be capable of imparting it, and what a career was opening for such a man. I shall attempt to tell under what circumstances and conditions Balzac became that man.

CHAPTER II

YEARS OF APPRENTICESHIP

Honoré de Balzac, or Balzac—or, more exactly, Balssa, since this is the name which his father's certificate of baptism bears, on the parish records of Canezac, in the department of Tarn—was born on May 20th, 1799, at Tours, "one of the least literary cities of France"—at all events, so he himself says—where his father filled the office of "Director of Charities". His mother, whose maiden name was Laure Sallambier, was of Parisian origin. In speaking of Balzac, whose mother was a native of Paris and whose father came from Languedoc, nothing, therefore, would be more idle than to undertake to point to Touraine and the "Touraine temperament". In a "picture of France" after the manner of Michelet it is proper to characterise Touraine or Brittany, because that is of no importance, but not in a study on Balzac or Chateaubriand, where one should endeavour to be specific; and if there is, perhaps, such a thing as a Touraine temperament, of which I do not feel sure, it is hard to see from whom Balzac

could have derived it; or how, not having inherited it from either his father or his mother, he could have acquired it at the College of Vendôme, where, from his ninth to his fifteenth year, he carried on his first studies. He was then, 'tis said, a "big chubby-faced child", who must have looked like all "big chubby-faced children"; and it is related that already his precocious literary bent amazed his young classmates; but this is related also of many school-boys who have not become, on that account, the author of *César Birotteau*, or even of *The Inheritress De Birague*. After all, how useless are all such researches! They have been indulged in for seventy-five or a hundred years, and have resulted only in thoroughly demonstrating their absolute uselessness.

The young man, after completing his studies in Paris, where his father, in 1814, had been appointed "Inspector of Supplies for the First Military Division", in 1816 took up the study of law. Certain people have thought it necessary to remark, in this connection, that in order to initiate him, according to usage and tradition, in practice as well as theory, his parents apprenticed him for eighteen months to an attorney, and for another eighteen months to a notary. The notary's name was Passez, and the attorney's Guyonnet-Merville. The

latter is supposed to have served as a model for the Derville who will be seen to reappear so often in *The Human Comedy* (*La Comédie humaine*); and one may lose one's time in trying to ascertain whether some of the traits of the former are not to be found also in the numerous notaries of Balzac; for instance, in one of those who are the principal characters in *The Marriage Contract* (*Le Contrat de Mariage*).

Is it my intention to deny that Balzac turned to some account this brief acquaintance with business? By no means, even though the usual occupation of a third or fourth clerk is not of a nature to cause him to delve deeply into the arcana of law and legal procedure. I should like, also, to feel more certain than I do of the thoroughness of Balzac's knowledge of jurisprudence. But I feel sure of one thing—that if Balzac had not derived his knowledge from the notary's or the attorney's office, he would certainly have obtained it elsewhere, because he was Balzac, and his work would be none the less what it is. Men of genius know a good many things without having learned them; and we, who know the same things only on condition of having studied them, would have it that genius must have studied like ourselves. We are wrong!

Balzac might well have asked us at what school and on what fields of battle the conqueror of Arcole and Rivoli learned the art of war.

Indeed, while the young man was accomplishing or submitting to these three years of probation, other ambitions had already turned him away from the study of law. He had conceived the idea of a drama on *Cromwell* (1819)—a subject which may be said to have been at that time haunting the imaginations of all Frenchmen, poets, historians, and professors—and, to prepare for it, he read with avidity "our four tragic authors", upon whom he passed this curious judgment: "Crébillon reassures me; Voltaire appalls me; Corneille transports me; Racine causes me to lay down my pen."* But after applying himself for fifteen months to the writing of this drama, he bethought himself of trying it upon a gathering of his family and friends. A competent judge—Andrieux, author of *The Cheerful Miller* (*Le Meunier Sans-Souci*), instructor at the École Polytechnique and professor at the Collège de France, it is reported—declared that the author of that rhapsody ought to take up "anything

* *General Correspondence* (*Correspondance générale*), 1820, No. VIII.

whatsoever, except literature".* This man of a good deal of wit and taste would, perhaps, a few years later, have expressed the same opinion of *Eugénie Grandet* and *Old Goriot.* But Balzac, who could not foresee that, accepted this judgment as far as *Cromwell* and even the stage were concerned; and it was then that he turned his attention to the novel. *The Inheritress De Birague* (1822) was to be his first attempt in this form of composition.

From this moment, also, began for him that restless and irregular life, henceforth to be his, in which intrigues count for but little, but which was to be, none the less, more exhausting than that of any of his contemporaries, more so than the erratic but merry existence of the elder Alexandre Dumas and the industrious but so regular existence of Victor Hugo. "A fire broke out at No. 9, Rue Lesdiguières, in a poor fellow's head," he wrote to his sister and confidante, "and the firemen have not been able to put it out." The conflagration was to go on burning for twenty-five years, under the ashes, and the "poor fellow" was to be consumed by it. Let me also say that this is the bright side of the

* *Balzac, his Life and Works* (*Balzac, sa Vie et ses Œuvres*), by Laure Surville, Balzac's sister: 1856.

life and character of Balzac. His self-reliance, which is not always free from charlatanism—and presently it will be only too easy for me to give more proofs of it than I could wish—was equalled only by his pertinacity in labour; and it is true that the details in regard to this which we find in his *Correspondence* (*Correspondance*) are not free from exaggeration—he managed, like Dumas, to find time to "enjoy himself", and somewhat in the same way—but seldom has a human existence been consumed in such painful and frenzied toil.

Born with every appetite, and without the means of gratifying them, Balzac looked to work alone for his resources, and, in the relentless struggle against debt which he kept up for thirty years, it should be said that he relied on no one but himself, and on himself alone. For this reason I am not among those who reproach him very severely for not having been more modest in his tastes, more bourgeois in his ambitions, and more orderly in his affairs. Has not Bossuet himself—whose name one would not, perhaps, expect to see appear on this occasion—confessed somewhere "that he could not work if he was pinched for means in his household"? So I am not shocked to see what a prominent part the

money question played in the life of Balzac. Possibly it plays too great a part in his *Correspondence*, and notably in the voluminous collection of his *Letters to an Alien* (*Lettres à l'Étrangère*). Doubtless Countess Hanska was pleased to ascertain that Balzac's fertility of resource was on all occasions superior to his difficulties; and, indeed, it is no commonplace spectacle to see his masterpieces brought forth because of his need of luxury, and the fertility of his genius not only remain unexhausted in its source, but increase, as it were, with the exacting demands of his creditors, the necessities of his situation, and the enormous amount of his earnings. Besides, who does not feel that if the money question had taken up less room in his life it would also have occupied less in his work? And who doubts but that the work would lose thereby, I do not mean any of its "beauty", but certainly some of its character and "modernity"?

Once, however, he came near sinking, and that was about the year 1825, when, *The Inheritress De Birague*, *Clotilde de Lusignan*, *Argow the Pirate*, and *Paleface Jane* not having yielded him the returns he had hoped to get from them, in his impatience he took a quicker but more risky road to fortune, and when, from being a man of letters—for from

1825 to 1828 he was to produce nothing, or next to nothing—he turned bookseller, printer, and type-founder. For this episode in Balzac's life, hitherto not well known, the reader will allow me to refer him to the recent book of MM. Gabriel Hanotaux and George Vicaire.* But I ought, however, to mention here that the venture, after three years of disappointments, ended, in 1828, in a disastrous liquidation, which left Balzac in debt to various parties for something like one hundred thousand francs, and without a copper to pay them. And, indeed, as he again courageously took up his pen, to lay it down no more until his death, this unfortunate venture would not be worth emphasising, were it not for the fact that we must see in this enormous debt, which was not to be paid up until 1838, and then only by incurring new debts, a quite natural excuse for Balzac's avidity in money matters; and were it not also for this other fact, that it was really there, in the Rue des Marais-Saint-Germain—now Rue Visconti—that he began his apprenticeship to practical life.

For, in my opinion, it is not at all because he served a time of probation with a notary

* *Balzac's Youth: Balzac the Printer* (*La Jeunesse de Balzac: Balzac Imprimeur*), Paris, 1903, Librairie des Amateurs.

or with an attorney, but because he himself had to struggle with real creditors, that Balzac has so dramatically described the vicissitudes of César Birotteau's insolvency; in the same way that in *Lost Illusions* (*Illusions perdues*), when he described the anguish of David Séchard, he had only to remember the pangs which he underwent when, like David, he carried on the printer's trade.

It was this sort of experience which preceding novelists had lacked. All of them, from Le Sage to Madame Sand, lived in a bourgeois way, and thus their only knowledge of toil, or even of poverty, was derived from books. I mean that kind of experience which is acquired neither by total ruin, commercial dishonour, nor penal responsibility. Formerly one became a "gentleman" on becoming a man of letters; one put on a sword, as Rousseau did, even if one had cast off, only the day before, the butler's or the valet's livery; and in Balzac's day one became at least a "bourgeois"; one classed oneself among the liberal professions, from which one looked down somewhat scornfully—even were one to starve on returning to one's garret—upon occupations which sweat in toil, or the tradesman who sold linen "at the sign of the Cat and Racket". This is one of the reasons why the novel lacked substance and

life; for of all forms of composition the novel is the one whose roots should be the most deeply implanted in reality. If the novel, with other qualities—of interest and emotion, eloquence and pathos—was but a remote reproduction of life, it was because novelists, for the greater part, had not themselves lived, in the proper and real sense of the word, in the sense of being "pressed with business", if I may so call it, and because in going from college into the profession of letters they had placed themselves in a position where their outlook upon life was necessarily from the seclusion of their closets.

But Balzac—he really lived! His experience was both practical and effectual; if he did not continue it long—although at his age, from twenty-six to twenty-nine, three years count for something in a man's existence—he prolonged it in the direction towards which circumstances, and chance, if you will, had once pointed it. Emerging from his commercial and industrial ventures with debts only, he remained very curious to know how men like Popinot and Crevel, Du Tillet and Nucingen, Pilleraut and Crottat, Roguin and even Gobseck, could have made their fortunes. He interested himself in knowing what men like Birotteau produced in their "laboratories". He watched the fluctuations of the Stock Exchange and

the market-prices of corn and provisions, of madder and indigo. The truth is, Balzac realised that genius itself could learn life only from life; and life, not as each one of us chooses to picture it to himself, but life as it is lived around us, in our day, at every degree of the social scale; and restless life, or rather, life made up of cares and anxieties, which oftenest have nothing very elevating nor singular, nor, especially, very unusual in them, but which are life and cannot, therefore, be omitted from its intended representation to us. Let me hasten to add that if there are other and less vulgar cares and anxieties, Balzac was not ignorant of them.

Among the persons who had interposed to save him from threatening bankruptcy, there happened to be a woman, Madame de Berny, who, as was well known—through the *Correspondence* and the *Letters to an Alien*—had filled an important place in the life of Balzac, but whose distinguished, appealing, and sorrowful countenance still remained in a semi-obscurity. Fortunate and unexpected event! It was through the examining of the accounts of Balzac's printing-house that MM. Hanotaux and Vicaire acquired the means of again bringing to light the face of Madame de Berny.

Madame de Berny, the wife of a magistrate and the mother of nine children, was forty-five or forty-six years old when she became the mistress of Balzac, who was then himself twenty-three. The daughter of one of Louis XVI.'s musicians—his name was Hinner—and of a waiting-woman of Marie-Antoinette, Madame de Berny had spent her early youth at Court. After her father's death in 1784 her mother had married, in 1787, the Chevalier de Jarjayes, a brigadier, a man whom the Queen fully trusted and one of those who attempted to free her from the Temple Prison; his name is to be found in all the memoirs of the day. Six years later, in the midst of the Terror, on the 8th of April, 1793, the young girl became Madame de Berny. "With the King and Queen for her sponsors," MM. Hanotaux and Vicaire rightly say of her, "brought up in their set, a witness of the last festivities and first sorrows, having felt in her own heart the shock of all the great crises, entrusted with plots and secrets, having held in her hands the letters, rings, and locks of hair," —this refers to two earrings and a lock of her hair which Marie-Antoinette had caused to be forwarded, from the foot of the scaffold, to Chevalier de Jarjayes—" what a number of events in such a life! How many emotions

in that wounded heart! What dramas could be read or surmised in that already far-away look! What an open book that living memory must have been, and how fervently the young student of life would turn over its leaves!" And, further on, the same biographers attribute to this first liaison of Balzac not only what historical colour may be found in such a narrative as *The Seamy Side of Contemporary History* (*L'Envers de l'Histoire contemporaine*), for instance, or in *An Episode under the Terror* (*Un Épisode sous la Terreur*), but even, if the term be not slightly ambitious, the political formation of the novelist, and that "royalism" whose unexpected outbursts are in such strong contrast, or even at such variance, with the general character of his work. It should be added that, at all events, that royalism gained for him the admiration and adherence of critics or biographers who would forgive a democratic novelist neither the liberties of *Cousin Bette* (*La Cousine Bette*) nor the "immorality" of *A Bachelor's Establishment* (*Un Ménage de Garçon*).

But there was something else that Balzac learned from Madame de Berny; and the "Queen's goddaughter" was really an educator for the son of the "Inspector of Supplies for the First Military Division". She did not

make of him a "well-bred man": his temperament was too strong; his personality was too external; his self-esteem and self-satisfaction were too exuberant. But by the aid of the gentle and almost maternal authority which her age gave her Madame de Berny smoothed, fashioned, and trained to the usages of the world the boisterous, petulant, and common fellow, as his first letters show him to have been, who so easily mistook the coarse laugh of the bagman on a stroll for the smile of the intelligent man. She did not make a gentleman of him—that would only have hampered him in the accomplishment of the task which was to be his—but she rid him, as much as it was possible to do so, of his naturally charlatanical ways. "Dearest," she wrote to him, in 1832—that is to say, at a time when their liaison went back more than ten years, "have it so that the whole multitude notice you, from all sides, owing to the height upon which you stand, *but don't cry out to them to admire you.*" Balzac did not profit by this advice as much as one might wish.

Evidently, it is impossible, without making oneself quite ridiculous, to try to state with precision what was the nature of Balzac's feeling for Madame de Berny. But if, perhaps, in the endeavour to understand the passions

of love and to represent them on the stage or in the novel, it is of no small use to have loved, then. It was singularly fortunate for Balzac that, at the age for vulgar love-affairs, he met Madame de Berny. "It is only a woman's last love which satisfies a young man's first love," he wrote in *The Duchess of Langeais* (*La Duchesse de Langeais*). Balzac's sentimental education was not acquired, like that of most of his contemporaries, in the chance meetings of Parisian life, from a Madame Dudevant, as was Musset's, or a Madame Colet, like Gustave Flaubert's, and still less from a Madame Schontz or Malaga of his day; but from a woman who belonged to "society", whose weakness apparently took away nothing of the consideration that was accorded to her, and whose uneasy fondness, watchful solicitude, and ardent affection no doubt succeeded in purifying a conception of love which otherwise would not have differed much from that to be found in the *Droll Stories* (*Contes drôlatiques*). If I wished to search in his works for the woman whose traits most recall Madame de Berny, I should see her in Marguerite Claës, the victim in *The Quest of the Absolute* (*La Recherche de l'Absolu*), rather than in Madame de Mortsauf, the somewhat unpleasant heroine of *The Lily of the Valley*

(*Le Lys dans la Vallée*). And it may be added that in no one of his characters, nor anywhere in his work, not even in the numerous letters of his *Correspondence* where he mentions her, has Balzac better expressed than in Balthasar Claës the nature of his affection for this great friend of his youth—always ready to sacrifice everything to him, and he, like Balthasar, in his quest for the "philosopher's stone", always ready to strip her of her possessions and drive her to despair, even while he idolised her. "You understand," he wrote to the Alien, in 1834, in speaking of Madame de Berny, "you understand that I have not drawn Claës in order that I may do as he did!" It is only when one fears to have deserved a reproach of this kind that one tries to clear oneself of it, or to forestall it.

I am not recording here the tittle-tattle of Balzac's love-affairs, and I will even confess that had I been the only one to lift the veil which concealed from us the face of Madame de Berny, I should have let it fall again, and it would still protect her. To disclose her thus would have been wrong in me, and I admit it only to excuse myself. It was not to "intrude" into Balzac's biography that Madame de Berny loved him! And yet, who shall say that the vague idea of some day having her

name publicly associated with the fame of this hungerer after celebrity had not something to do with the persistency of her affection? But if it cannot be said with certainty that this was the case with Madame de Berny, it was surely so with Countess Hanska, and this obliges me to say a few words about her. One does not write from the remoteness of the Ukraine to a man of letters, whom, moreover, one does not know, merely to exchange with him opinions on æsthetics. Generally speaking, two other sentiments enter into a correspondence of this kind: namely, the more distant hope of being admitted to share the great man's glory, and the nearer intention of perturbing him a little.

Need I, after so saying, recall that we have a whole volume of letters—and we shall soon have two—written by Balzac to Madame Hanska, which contain the most valuable information about Balzac himself, and also on fifteen or eighteen years of our literary history? There is to be found there, for instance, a certain Jules Sandeau, whom we were taught to respect, in our youth, and who seems to have played as sorry a part as a friend in the life of Balzac as he did that of a lover in Madame Sand's. There are to be found there, too, curious judgments of this very Madame

Sand, of Alexandre Dumas, Eugène Sue, and Victor Hugo, and Balzac's real opinion of his emulators in popularity. Especially worthy of notice is what he says of Madame George Sand, shortly after visiting her at Nohant: "She knows and says of herself what I think of her, without my having told her: that she has neither strength of conception, nor the gift of planning, nor the faculty of getting at reality, nor the art of being pathetic; but that, without knowing the French language, she has *style*, and she speaks the truth."* And, of course, we are to understand that all that Madame Sand has not he believes that he himself possesses—plus a knowledge of the French language. These are also the qualities which he considers essential in a novel, and for the present I will say nothing more on the subject. But, in this connection, a no less interesting judgment worth noting is the one he expressed on Walter Scott. "I have been saying for twelve years of Walter Scott what you write me of him,"—Madame Hanska had probably just discovered him!—"in comparison with him Lord Byron is nothing, or next to nothing. You are mistaken in regard to the plan of *Kenilworth*. In the minds of all novel-*makers*

* *Letters to an Alien*, 1838, No. CXXXV.

and in my mind, that is to say, in the opinion of all connoisseurs, the plan of this work is the grandest, the most complete and extraordinary of all. It is the *masterpiece*, from this point of view,"—it is Balzac, it will be noticed, who italicises everywhere—" as *St. Ronan's Well* is the masterpiece for *detail* and patient finish; as the *Chronicles of the Canongate* is the masterpiece for *sentiment; Ivanhoe* (the first volume, of course) the *historical* masterpiece; *The Antiquary* for *poetry; The Heart of Midlothian* for *interest*. They have each a particular merit, but genius is everywhere." * One likes, for once, to hear Balzac speak of his art! And the *Letters to an Alien* are, in a word, interesting in this, that they show us Balzac struggling with a sentiment whose nature it is as difficult to determine as its influence upon the whole trend of his work it is impossible to deny.

It was the most fervent of Balzacians—since there are Balzacians as there are Molièrists—Viscount de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, who made known to us, in *A Love Romance* (*Roman d'Amour*),† and since then, by publishing the *Letters to an Alien*,‡ that person, Eveline Rzewuska, Countess Hanska, who

* *Letters to an Alien*, 1838, No. CXXXIII.
† Paris, 1893, Calmann-Lévy.
‡ Paris, 1899, Calmann-Lévy.

was to bear one day the name of Madame de Balzac.

She is not very interesting, and it is somewhat difficult to understand, at first, how Balzac, seemingly, came to be seized with such a great love for her. In truth, this passion was not a very absorbing one, considering that after two meetings, at Geneva and Neufchâtel, they saw each other only once between 1834 and 1842, in Vienna—and that means a duration of eight years—and, after the death of Count Hanski, three or four times only, between 1842 and 1848—I should almost be tempted to say "during the short interval between two trains", if such an expression were not too up-to-date for that period. But the "correspondence" is all the more abundant on that account, and yet we have only a part of it, since, after all, for two hundred and forty-eight letters of Balzac, some of them volumes long, we have not one from Madame Hanska. Yet one would like to read them. Where are they? And who will give them to us?

They might, perhaps, help us in our path through this love-story; for, in regard to Balzac's letters, with the exception of the first—I mean those written between 1833 and 1836—I cannot help feeling that his love has not the true ring to it. I do not mean to say

that it is not sincere! Love almost always lacks the true ring in the love "correspondence" of men of letters. They are almost always a tone too high or too low. And, in Balzac's letters to Madame Hanska, the really singular ease with which he passes from the most ardent declarations of love to questions concerning his own interests or literary vanity is somewhat open to suspicion. For instance, "Oh, my sweet Eva," he writes to her, "heavens, how I love you! I hope to see you soon. Only ten days more, and I shall have done all I had to do. I shall have published four octavo volumes in one month. Love alone can accomplish such things! My love, oh, bear with this delay, but do not upbraid me for it! How could I know, when I promised you to return, that I should sell for thirty-six thousand francs the *Studies of Manners* (*Études de Mœurs*), and that I should have to compound for nine thousand francs the actions brought against me? I kneel at your beloved feet, I kiss them, I fondle them —oh, I commit in my mind all the extravagances in the world! I kiss you with rapture, I hold you, I embrace you, I am as happy as are the angels in the bosom of God." *

* *Letters to an Alien*, 1833, No. XXIII.

And, as no doubt the angels sometimes leave "the bosom of God" to toy with trifles, he thereupon informs her that he has indulged himself in the purchase of "the prettiest pair of sconces that I ever saw", for his room, and also, for his feasts, two candelabra. "He knew, from having ferreted them out, all the bric-à-brac stores of Europe," says Sainte-Beuve.

What, then, is the secret of this long correspondence and—although, indeed, Balzac did not deny himself any diversion—of this long faithfulness? It is, perhaps, chiefly because, as Balzac liked to tell of his own affairs, a thing which is not always very entertaining to other people, because each one has his own, he had found in Countess Hanska an incomparable confidante, from whom he disguised nothing of his money difficulties—exaggerating them a little, at times—nor of his prodigious labour, at times imaginary, which allowed him to meet them. The display of his strength is one of Balzac's strong characteristics, and for eighteen years Countess Hanska gave him a chance to parade it.

Shall I say that, in addition, she was "Countess" Hanska, a foreigner and a lady of rank? In those days of romanticism it was an unusual honour for a man of letters to be "dis-

tinguished" by a foreigner and a great lady. Balzac was certainly very sensible of it. Few of his contemporaries could plume themselves on being loved by a "Polish countess", and his liaison with Madame Hanska, which was vaguely suspected, was for him, among his "confrères", as a badge of nobility or an aristocratic privilege. Perhaps he saw in it, too, an excellent means of "puff". And when, in 1841, after the death of Count Hanski, he entertained the hope of marrying her, this marriage no doubt appeared to him as the long-expected compensation for his disappointments of all kinds. Madame Hanska had held out this hope to him for nine years.

Finally—and as the observer was always to be found in him—I have no doubt that he loved in Madame Hanska the aristocratic model after which he has drawn more than one of his female characters; and, without one's being able to say exactly which, there must be more than one of her traits in the countesses and duchesses of *The Human Comedy*. As much as Madame de Berny, but in another way, Madame Hanska was for Balzac the feminine judge whom a novelist always thinks of satisfying; whose tastes he likes to please, and whose traits he likes to portray; and in whose company he takes credit to him-

self for the sweet flattery which he interweaves with the faithfulness of his copy.

So that, while the love-affairs of so many men of letters have generally succeeded only in turning them away from their work, as in the case of Musset; or have served only to break the monotony of their existence and to afford them some relaxation from their continuous labour, as in the case of George Sand; Balzac's genius, on the contrary, was enriched by the lessons of his experience in love-affairs, and he made use of it as a means of getting more deeply at reality. There, again, is one of the causes which were to make him the master novelist. Never had his life been separated from his art, nor his art been distinct from his life; and it is for this very reason, through a contradiction which in reality is not one, but which I must try to explain, that one is astonished, on carefully reading over his correspondence, to see how little his mind was occupied with art, and how few and far between such questions appear in his letters.

In order to understand this fully, go back to the heroic days of romanticism, and read Sainte-Beuve's first *Mondays* (*Lundis*), the aggressive *Mondays*, his *Contemporary Portraits* (*Portraits contemporains*), or the preface of *Mademoiselle de Maupin;* or also, and nearer us,

the *Correspondence* of him whom I should call "the last of the romanticists"—I mean Gustave Flaubert—if Émile Zola had not existed. The question of art occupies, nay, it haunts, the minds of these writers. What is art, and what is its object? By what means shall we succeed in reaching this object? How far ought we to carry faithfulness of imitation? quest for the pathetic? concern for form and style? Shall all realities be worthy our attention? And, under the pretext of making them "point a moral", shall we have a right to embellish them? or, inversely, a right to "vulgarise" them, in order to satirise them, to the detriment of resemblance? If Balzac was not actually ignorant of all these questions, which were being discussed around him in literary coteries, he did not appear, at all events, to trouble his head much about them; and this seems, on first thought, rather surprising.

It was because, in truth, he cared less for art or perfection than he did for success. He was only twenty-three when he wrote to his sister: "Of what use are fortune and enjoyment when youth has departed? An old man is one who has dined and who watches others eat, and I—I am young, my plate is empty, and I am hungry. Laure, Laure, will my two only and boundless wishes, *to be famous*

and to be loved,"—the italics are his—"ever be gratified?"* He does not say "to produce some masterpiece", or even "to perpetuate my name in the memory of men". He says "to be famous"; and he means "celebrated in fame 'that pays'". That is an unpleasant side of his character. He is satisfied with reality; he will always be satisfied with it; and whether, as writer or man, his genius may go beyond it, his ideal, his ambition in art, will never go beyond mastering it. This will also be the limit of his conception of art. He will nurse no dream of lonely perfection; he "will not mortgage" his labour to "Posterity"; he will not wait for the future to compensate him for his mortifications or failures. Glory will never mean anything else for him but "to be celebrated", and to be so in the present, in the eyes of and among his contemporaries, in the way that one is in one's own time, on the boulevards, in the newspapers, at booksellers', and especially for the display of luxury which his novels will have brought him. For his philosophy of art, in this respect, is very simple: genius creates fortune, and fortune is a proof of genius. Let me quote, apropos thereof, this passage from a letter written in 1836:

* *Correspondence*, 1822, No. XV.

"I called on a speculator named Bohain, who was the first to bring out *Literary Europe* (*L'Europe littéraire*), and whom I had served quite disinterestedly. He immediately summoned the man who got Chateaubriand out of difficulties, and a capitalist who has recently gone into the book business. And this is the contract which has issued from our four heads:

"First, I have been given fifty thousand francs to pay off my most pressing debts.

"Second, I am assured, for the first year, fifteen hundred francs a month. The second year I may have three thousand francs a month, and the fourth four thousand, up to the fifteenth year, if I provide a certain number of volumes. We are neither authors nor publishers, but partners. I contribute the value of all my works already written, and to be written during the next fifteen years. My three associates pledge themselves to advance all expenses, and to give me half of all profits above the cost of each volume. My eighteen, twenty-four, or forty-eight thousand francs, plus the fifty thousand francs given, are to be deducted from my share.

"Such is the substance of this contract, which frees me forever from newspapers, publishers, and lawsuits. . . . It is a thousand times more advantageous than that of M. de

Chateaubriand, with whom I find myself classed by speculators; for I sell nothing of my future, while for one hundred thousand francs, plus twelve thousand francs income, which will become twenty-five thousand when he shall have published something—and even then only as a life annuity—M. de Chateaubriand has pledged his all." *

Is it an artist, a writer, to whom we are listening? And who would take this letter for a "love-letter"? But it is Balzac, the real Balzac, and no other who is speaking, and what is more surprising here than all the rest is that this indifference to the question of art is precisely, when we consider the matter carefully, one of the reasons for the merit of Balzac's novels.

It has been said of the elder Dumas that he was "a force of nature"; and never was more pompous praise less deserved: the elder Dumas was nothing but a negro, one who was quite happy to exploit white people, and who laughed immoderately over it. But it is to Balzac that Michelet's mot applies. "A force of nature"! Yes, if by this expression we understand an obscure and undetermined power, a boundless and unruly fecundity; a secret

* *Letters to an Alien*, 1836, No. CXVII.

activity which is increased by the obstacles standing in its way, and passes around those which it does not overcome; an unconsciousness whose effects resemble, yet surpass, those of the most deeply-laid plan; moreover, an unequal, capricious, and, so to speak, tumultuous unconsciousness, capable in its confusion of producing "monstrosities" as well as masterpieces: such are, precisely, the imagination and genius of Balzac. Such a force needs no art. All that it contains in itself necessarily aspires to *be*, and *will be*, if circumstances allow. It conceives no other purposes, it has no other more remote or deliberate intentions than to manifest itself, to exert itself, and, if you will, to astonish the world by the greatness of its display. Nor does this depend on the force itself; and just as Balzac writes badly only so often as he applies himself to write well, in like manner his worst novels—and he has written some abominable ones, in the foremost rank of which no consideration will keep me from placing *A Woman of Thirty* (*La Femme de trente Ans*)—are those in which he wanted to give proof of more penetration or delicacy, psychology, literature, or art than he possessed.

Balzac's art and nature are one; and such is not the case with all great artists—among whom, on the contrary, one might mention

several whose art consists only in having triumphed over their nature—but perhaps it is the case with all the "creators". One can really "compete with the *état civil*",* according to the great novelist's expression, only by steps analogous or similar to those of Nature, who is possibly conscious of her end, but unconscious of the means she takes, or rather, which are imposed upon her, to reach it. And that is why dissertations on art are scarce in Balzac's *Correspondence*. But, also, that is why his great novels are none the less art, because art is naturally included in nature, and one has only to follow, so to speak, the natural bent of one's genius, when one is, like Balzac, a "force of nature". It will always be more prudent, however, not to believe oneself to be a "force of nature", and to wait, before presuming to do so, until events have settled the question.

* *État civil*, the condition of a person resulting from his or her filiation, alliances, and family rights.—TRANS.

CHAPTER III

THE HUMAN COMEDY

THE thing which interests us in some writers, or in their works, and especially in the works of most of Balzac's contemporaries, is themselves; and in *The Lake* (*Le Lac*), or *Olympio's Sadness* (*Tristesse d'Olympio*), in *The Nights* (*Les Nuits*) of Musset, in his *Confession of a Child of the Century* (*Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle*), in the first novels, at least, of George Sand, what we do is to try to recover the very personal and particular "soul-states" which, at a given moment of their real life, were those of Madame Sand and Victor Hugo, of Lamartine and Alfred de Musset. In truth, we might, we even ought to attach some importance to the fact that if we are curious to know their soul-states, it is because they are the authors of their works. If *The Lake* were not all that it is, in other respects, and, whatever it may be, if we did not consider that it would still be all that it is, we should care very little to know who and what manner of woman Elvire was, and the nature of Lamartine's sentiments towards her. The *Confession of a Child*

of the Century is an essential "document" in the biography of Alfred de Musset. But what interest should we take in Alfred de Musset's biography, if he were not Alfred de Musset; and by that I mean, not Alfred, his father's son and the brother of Paul, whose soul-states would be, I think, absolutely indifferent to us, but the poet of his *Nights* and the author of his plays? A purely personal literature has interest for the historian only in so far as it succeeds in becoming impersonal, and the "subjective" leaves the realm of psychological or pathological singularity, to enter the region of art, only by becoming "objective". I apologise for using these terms; but they have come into current use, and there would to-day be more pedantry in avoiding than in employing them.

What remains true is that one can study the writers of this school—and period—only in the chronological sequence of their works, since it is the very sequence of their sentiments. Nor can one isolate or detach from their biography the examination of their works, since their works are only moments in their biography. Such is the case with George Sand. The real interest of her first novels—*Valentine*, *Indiana*, even *Lélia*—is the fact of their being her own history, or, at all events,

the expression of her dream. But how she came to pass from her first novels to those of her third and last manner—*The Marquis of Villemer* (*Le Marquis de Villemer*) and *Mademoiselle La Quintinie*—could not be or would be wrongly explained if one did not insert between the first and last her socialistic novels, *The Travelling Journeyman* (*Le Compagnon du Tour de France*) or *M. Antoine's Transgression* (*Le Péché de M. Antoine*), and if one failed to include especially the enumeration of the political and masculine influences under which she composed them: Lamennais, Pierre Leroux, Michel de Bourges, Agricol Perdiguier, and Charles Poncy. When works are in a manner the creatures of circumstances, then, to understand them, it becomes indispensable to state with precision the circumstances of their production. It is no less indispensable to link these circumstances with each other; and this can be accomplished—although historians and critics of literature have more than once forgotten it—only by respecting chronology. The "art of verifying dates" * is, and will remain, the foundation of every kind of history.

But Balzac belongs to another school, and

* An allusion to an historical work, *The Art of Verifying Dates* (*L'Art de vérifier les Dates*), compiled by the Benedictines in the eighteenth century.—TRANS.

the most apparent characteristic of his work is precisely its objectivity. His novels are not confessions of his life; and the choice of his subjects is never dictated to him by particular and, in a way, private reasons. He neither speaks in them of himself, nor does he reveal his way of looking at things; or when he speaks of himself, he does it in disguise, and when he tells us his way of looking at things, he does not wish to be recognised. His reiterated declarations are positive on this point. Let us go a step further and say that, in a general way, it is not Balzac who selects his subjects, but it is the subjects which take possession of him, so to speak, and force themselves upon him. That is why—apart from his need of money—as we see, he always has three or four novels on the stocks at the same time. But he has a good many more in his head! Or rather, his entire work—and in this are included those parts of it which he has not had the time to realise—is present as a whole in his mind, and it is not when he wishes it, or because he wishes it, that such or such a fragment is detached—see, for instance, in his *Correspondence*, how many years he carried *César Birotteau* in his mind before writing it in a fortnight—but because the time for it has come. Hence this air of *necessity* which his great novels

have; these novels had to be, and they had to be just what they are! Hence the prodigious rapidity, at which he himself is at times astonished, with which he wrote or "redacted" some of them; he did not know that they were so ripe, as it were, nor, while he felt them confusedly moving in his brain, that they would be so soon ready to live their own lives. Hence, moreover, the reason for what is living or really "organic" in them; and hence the relations or connections which they all maintain with each other, and which the plan of *The Human Comedy* has made more manifest, but which would be just as close and certain even if the execution of this plan were less complete than it is.

Balzac realised very well, besides, that this organic—and unique—character constituted the originality of his work; and, being Balzac, he did not scruple to inform his contemporaries of it. I chanced upon this often-quoted sentence from a letter to his sister (1833), apropos of *Eugénie Grandet:* "Ah! there are too many millions in *Eugénie Grandet?* But, you goose, since the story is true, would you have me do better than truth?" And good Balzacians do not fail to express loudly their admiration for the strength of illusion which these words seem to indicate, without noticing that in another

letter, written at the same period (end of December, 1833), to Madame Zulma Carraud, whose judgment he dreads far more than his sister's, Balzac explains his meaning on the same subject in these words: "I can answer nothing to your criticisms, except that facts are against you. In Tours there is a man who keeps a grocer's shop who has eight million francs; M. Eynard, a mere peddler, has twenty millions; he had in his house thirteen millions in gold; he invested them, in 1814, in government securities at fifty-six francs, and thus increased his thirteen millions to twenty millions. Nevertheless, in the next edition I will make Grandet's fortune six millions less." The story, although a true one, was not therefore so absolutely true that it would not allow of some compounding with truth!

But another sentence, which I also borrow from a letter addressed to Madame Zulma Carraud, and dated January 30, 1834, is much more important: "You have been very little affected by my poor *Eugénie Grandet*, which so well portrays provincial life; but a work which is to contain all social characters and positions *can*, I believe, *be understood only when it is completed*."

At that date he meant to speak only of his *Studies of Manners*, the first edition of which was

published in September, 1834—I mean, the first edition bearing that title—by Veuve C. Béchet. Of his great novels he had published, at this same date, only *The Chouans* (*Les Chouans*), *The Wild Ass's Skin* (*La Peau de Chagrin*), and *Eugénie Grandet*. But, nevertheless, he knew perfectly well that *Eugénie Grandet* does not stand alone in his work—it is not a *Kenilworth*, after which he will write a *Quentin Durward;* an *Indiana*, to be followed by a *Valentine;* a *Chronicle of Charles IX.* (*Chronique de Charles IX.*), which will have nothing else in common with a *Colomba* than to be signed by the same name—but that it has extensions, "correspondences", and ramifications, which he does not perceive very clearly himself, yet which exist, and which will become unravelled as he proceeds in his work. Thus with brothers and sisters, who, at the time of their early childhood, or even of their youth, have in common with each other only a certain natural likeness, and even then not always; but as they grow older, the features which individualised them become less marked, they return to the type of their parents, and it is easy to see that they are the children of the same father and mother. Balzac's novels maintain with one another a connection of this kind. They also have sprung from a common origin; and this common origin

is a pristine thought, which each of them expresses by one of its aspects, and yet, at the same time, in its entirety.

This is what he attempted to have a certain Félix Davin express in the two introductions, the greater part of which he doubtless dictated to him, in 1834 and 1835, one for the *Studies of Manners*, the other for the *Philosophic Studies* (*Études philosophiques*); and it is hard to understand why he should not have been more anxious to write with his own hand pieces of such importance.* Alas! it must be admitted —putting aside the encomium bestowed, which is extravagant to the point of immodesty— that these two prefaces are nothing but mere rigmarole, and pretentious rigmarole to boot. We no longer know to-day who this Félix Davin was; and, in truth, we feel, on reading his introductions, no desire to know more of him, or of the novels which we find listed under his name in catalogues: *An Illegitimate Daughter* (*Une Fille naturelle*), or the *History of a Suicide* (*Histoire d'un Suicide*). But do we find Balzac himself much clearer, in the following important passage of one of his letters to Madame Hanska?

* Compare C. de Lovenjoul, *History of Balzac's Works* (*Histoire des Œuvres de Balzac*), pages 46–64, and pages 194–207.

"The *Studies of Manners* will represent all social effects, without the omission of any situation in life, any physiognomy, any character of man or woman, any manner of life, any social zone, any French province, any profession, or anything belonging to childhood, old age, or middle age, politics, laws, or war.

"This being established, the history of the human heart traced thread by thread, and social history made in all its parts—that is the base. These will not be imaginary facts; they will be what take place everywhere.

"Then, the second course is the *Philosophic Studies*, for after *the effects* will come *the causes*. I shall have portrayed for you, in the *Studies of Manners*, sentiments and their play, life and its trend. In the *Philosophic Studies*, I shall tell you why these sentiments exist, upon what this life depends; what is the part, what are the conditions without which neither man nor society exists; and after having examined it in order to describe it [society], I shall review it in order to pass sentence upon it. Thus, in the *Studies of Manners*, *individualities* are *typified;* in the *Philosophic Studies*, *types* are *individualised*. Accordingly, I shall have given life everywhere: to the type, by individualising it, to the individual, by typifying it. I shall have given thought to the

atom; I shall have given the life of the individual to thought.

"Then, after *the effects* and *the causes*, come the *Analytic Studies* (*Études analytiques*), to which belongs *The Physiology of Marriage* (*La Physiologie du Mariage*); for, after *the effects* and *the causes*, one ought to search for *the principles*. *Manners* are the performance; *the causes* are *the wings* and *the machinery*. *The principles*—they are the *author*. But in proportion as the work reaches spirally the heights of thought, it contracts and condenses itself. If twenty-four volumes are necessary for the *Studies of Manners*, only fifteen will be needed for the *Philosophic Studies*, and only nine for the *Analytic Studies*. Thus man, society, and humanity will be described, judged, analysed, without repetitions, and in a work which will be, as it were, *The Thousand and One Nights* of the West.

"When all shall be finished, my Madeleine scraped, my *fronton* carved, my boards cleared away, my last finishing strokes given, I shall have been either right or wrong. But after having written the poetry, the demonstration, of a whole system, I shall write its science, in the *Essay on Human Forces* (*Essai sur les Forces humaines*). And upon the base of this palace, I, *childlike* and *laughsome*, shall have traced

the immense arabesque of *The One Hundred Droll Stories* (*Les cent Contes drôlatiques*)." *

No, really, all this logomachy is not very clear! And I may add that all the genius of Balzac is insufficient to extricate him from the confusion which it expresses. And yet he says what he means! And what he means is that in the same way that the individual exists only as a functional part of society, through it, in it, and for it, so each one of his novels has some meaning, or its whole meaning, only in its relation to *The Human Comedy*. The last shape, and, one would be tempted to say, "the last incarnation" of these gigantic designs, which, up to 1841, presented themselves to Balzac's mind, as a whole, only under the not over synthetic title of *Social Studies* (*Études sociales*), is, in fact, *The Human Comedy*, the prospectus of which appeared in the month of April, 1842.

It is related † that the idea of this title—to which his biographers, strangely enough, from Madame Surville, his sister, to M. André Le Breton, attach so much importance—was suggested to him by a friend of his, the Marquis

* *Letters to an Alien*, 1834, No. LXXII.

† Compare C. de Lovenjoul, *History of Balzac's Works*, Appendix, p. 414.

de Belloy, on his return from a trip to Italy, where no doubt this young man had discovered Dante; and since then writers have vied with one another in showing us some sort of close relation, which the novelist himself did not suspect, between the great Florentine's *Divine Comedy* and our Balzac's *Human Comedy*. But the truth is that, consider these close relations as much as one pleases, one cannot discern even the shadow of them; and all the fine talk about Dante's hell and the hell in which Balzac's "damned" move restlessly about will never be anything but talk.

I therefore honestly believe that, in giving to his work this title of *The Human Comedy*, Balzac took the expression in the very simple sense in which Musset had taken it:

> "Ever these actors, still this *comedy;*
> And 'spite all gloss of man's hypocrisy,
> One truth lies under all—a skeleton."

This is also the meaning given to it by Vigny, in *The Shepherd's House* (*La Maison du Berger*):

> "Neither your sighs nor wailings can I hear;
> Scarcely I feel the *human comedy*
> Move over me, searching the skies in vain
> For its mute audience."

And it is simply this sense which, in the language of Molière and La Fontaine, naturally

presents itself to the reader's mind. It is also the meaning which I again find in a sentence from Balzac himself, which I take from the dedication he wrote for his novel *Lost Illusions*, addressed to Victor Hugo: "Would not journalists as well as marquises, farmers-general, physicians, and attorneys have belonged to Molière and his plays? Why then should *The Human Comedy*, which *castigat ridendo mores*, make an exception for one power, when the Parisian press makes an exception for none?"

I am astonished at only one thing, which is that Balzac, having since 1833 been, as it were, in travail with his ruling idea, should have waited until 1841 to find a name for it, and, I will add, the only name which suited it, if, however, it is well understood that we shall attach to this name no symbolic or mystic meaning. The "human comedy" is the comedy which humanity plays for itself, each of us, in turn or together—as in political economy one is both producer and consumer—being actor or spectator in it. We are born, we live, we toil, we love, we hate, we forgive and we avenge ourselves, we help and we hinder one another, we rebel and we submit, we laugh and we weep, we grow indignant and are placated, we disagree, we fight, we fret, we quiet down —and we die. This is what happens in Bal-

zac's novels. And what matters, after that, under what title he has collected them all, when we once understand the solidarity which unites them?

I give here, after M. de Lovenjoul,* the catalogue of the works which were to constitute *The Human Comedy*, and the last details of which were definitively settled by Balzac in 1845:

THE HUMAN COMEDY†

(*LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE*)

FIRST PART

STUDIES OF MANNERS (*Études de Mœurs*)

Scenes of Private Life (*Scènes de la Vie privée*).

1. *The Children* (*Les Enfants*). 2. *A Young Ladies' Boarding-school* (*Un Pensionnat de Demoiselles*). 3. *Inside Life at College* (*In-*

* *History of Balzac's Works*, p. 217 and following.

† The reader should bear in mind that this is not a list of the works composing *The Human Comedy* as it was finally arranged, but merely as it was *planned* by Balzac in 1845. Balzac was constantly altering the titles of his works, and changing them from one division to another of *The Human Comedy*. "Indeed," as M. Spoelberch de Lovenjoul says, "as long as he lived Balzac constantly modified the classification of his works."—ED.

térieur de Collège). 4. At the Sign of the Cat and Racket (*La Maison du Chat-qui-pelote*). 5. The Dance at Sceaux (*Le Bal de Sceaux*). 6. Recollections of Two Young Brides (*Mémoires de deux jeunes Mariées*). 7. The Purse (*La Bourse*). 8. Modeste Mignon (*Modeste Mignon*). 9. A Start in Life (*Un Début dans la Vie*). 10. Albert Savarus (*Albert Savarus*). 11. The Vendetta (*La Vendetta*). 12. A Double Family (*Une double Famille*). 13. The Peace of the Household (*La Paix du Ménage*). 14. Madame Firmiani (*Madame Firmiani*). 15. A Study of Woman (*Étude de Femme*). 16. The Pretended Mistress (*La fausse Maîtresse*). 17. A Daughter of Eve (*Une Fille d'Ève*). 18. Colonel Chabert (*Le Colonel Chabert*). 19. The Message (*Le Message*). 20. La Grenadière (*La Grenadière*). 21. The Forsaken Woman (*La Femme abandonnée*). 22. Honorine (*Honorine*). 23. Béatrix (*Béatrix*). 24. Gobseck (*Gobseck*). 25. A Woman of Thirty (*La Femme de trente Ans*). 26. Old Goriot (*Le Père Goriot*). 27. Pierre Grassou (*Pierre Grassou*). 28. The Atheist's Mass (*La Messe de l'Athée*). 29. The Interdiction (*L'Interdiction*). 30. The Marriage Contract (*Le Contrat de Mariage*). 31. *Sons-in-law and Mothers-in-law* (*Gendres et Belles-mères*). 32. Another Study of Woman (*Autre Étude de Femme*).

Scenes of Provincial Life (*Scènes de la Vie de Province*).

33. The Lily of the Valley (*Le Lys dans la Vallée*). 34. Ursule Mirouet (*Ursule Mirouet*). 35. Eugénie Grandet (*Eugénie Grandet*). 36. The Celibates (*Les Célibataires*): (I) Pierrette (*Pierrette*). 37. (II) The Vicar of Tours (*Le Curé de Tours*). 38. (III) A Bachelor's Establishment (*Un Ménage de Garçon*).* 39. The Parisians in Provincial France (*Les Parisiens en Province*): (I) Gaudissart the Great (*L'illustre Gaudissart*). 40. (II) *Wrinkled People* (*Les Gens ridés*). 41. (III) The Muse of the Department (*La Muse du Département*). 42. (IV) *An Actress Abroad* (*Une Actrice en Voyage*). 43. The Superior Woman (*La Femme supérieure*). 44. The Rivalries (*Les Rivalités*): (I) *The Eccentric* (*L'Original*). 45. (II) *The Boisrouge Heirs* (*Les Héritiers Boisrouge*). 46. (III) The Old Maid (*La vieille Fille*). 47. The Provincials in Paris (*Les Provinciaux à Paris*): (I) The Cabinet of Antiques (*Le Cabinet des Antiques*). 48. (II) *Jacques de Metz* (*Jacques de Metz*). 49. Lost Illusions (*Illusions perdues*): (I) The Two Poets (*Les deux Poètes*). 50. (II) A Provincial Great Man in Paris (*Un grand Homme de Province à Paris*). 51. (III) An Inventor's Sufferings (*Les Souffrances de l'Inventeur*).

*Also entitled La Rabouilleuse (*La Rabouilleuse*).—Ed.

Scenes of Parisian Life (*Scènes de la Vie parisienne*).

52. History of the Thirteen (*Histoire des Treize*): (I) Ferragus (*Ferragus*). 53. (II) The Duchess of Langeais (*La Duchesse de Langeais*). 54. (III) The Girl with the Golden Eyes (*La Fille aux Yeux d'Or*). 55. The Employees (*Les Employés*). 56. Sarrasine (*Sarrasine*). 57. Grandeur and Downfall of César Birotteau (*Grandeur et Décadence de César Birotteau*). 58. The House of Nucingen (*La Maison Nucingen*). 59. Facino Cane (*Facino Cane*). 60. The Secrets of the Princess of Cadignan (*Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan*). 61. Splendours and Miseries of Courtesans (*Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes*): (I) How Harlots Love (*Comment aiment les Filles*). 62. (II) How Much Love Costs Old Men (*A combien l'Amour revient aux Vieillards*). 63. (III) The End of Bad Roads (*Où mènent les mauvais Chemins*). 64. (IV) The Last Incarnation of Vautrin (*La dernière Incarnation de Vautrin*). 65. *The Great, the Hospital, and the People* (*Les Grands, l'Hôpital, et le Peuple*). 66. A Prince of Bohemia (*Un Prince de la Bohême*). 67. The Involuntary Comedians (*Les Comédiens sans le savoir*). 68. A Sample of French Familiar Conversation (*Échantillon de Causerie française*). 69. *A Survey of the Law-court* (*Une*

Vue du Palais). 70. The Petty Bourgeois (*Les petits Bourgeois*).* 71. *Scholars among Themselves* (*Entre Savants*). 72. *The Stage as It Is* (*Le Théâtre comme il est*). 73. The Brothers of Consolation: The Seamy Side of Contemporary History (*Les Frères de la Consolation: L'Envers de l'Histoire contemporaine*).

Scenes of Political Life (*Scènes de la Vie politique*).

74. An Episode under the Terror (*Un Épisode sous la Terreur*). 75. *History and Fiction* (*L'Histoire et le Roman*). 76. A Dark Affair (*Une ténébreuse Affaire*). 77. *The Two Ambitious Men* (*Les deux Ambitieux*). 78. *The Attaché* (*L'Attaché d'Ambassade*). 79. *How a Cabinet is Formed* (*Comment on fait un Ministère*). 80. The Deputy of Arcis (*Le Député d'Arcis*).† 81. Z. Marcas (*Z. Marcas*).

Scenes of Military Life (*Scènes de la Vie militaire*).

82. *The Soldiers of the Republic* (*Les Soldats de la République*). 83. *The Opening of a Campaign* (*L'Entrée en Campagne*). 84. *The Vendeans* (*Les Vendéens*). 85. The Chouans (*Les Chouans*). 86. *The French in Egypt* (*Les Français en Egypte*): (I) *The Prophet* (*Le Prophète*). 87. (II) *The Pasha* (*Le Pacha*). 88. (III) A

* Left incomplete.—Ed.

† Left incomplete; continued by M. Charles Rabou. —Ed.

Passion in the Desert (*Une Passion dans le Désert*). 89. *An Army on the March* (*L'Armée roulante*). 90. *The Consular Guard* (*La Garde consulaire*). 91. *Under the Walls of Vienna* (*Sous Vienne*): (I) *A Combat* (*Un Combat*). 92. (II) *The Besieged Army* (*L'Armée assiégée*). 93. (III) *The Plain of Wagram* (*La Plaine de Wagram*). 94. *The Innkeeper* (*L'Aubergiste*). 95. *The English in Spain* (*Les Anglais en Espagne*). 96. *Moscow* (*Moscou*). 97. *The Battle of Dresden* (*La Bataille de Dresde*). 98. *The Stragglers* (*Les Traînards*). 99. *The Guerrillas* (*Les Partisans*). 100. *A Cruise* (*Une Croisière*). 101. *The Prison-ships* (*Les Pontons*). 102. *The Campaign of France* (*La Campagne de France*). 103. *The Last Field of Battle* (*Le dernier Champ de Bataille*). 104. *The Emir* (*L'Émir*). 105. *La Pénissière* (*La Pénissière*). 106. *The Algerian Pirate* (*Le Corsaire algérien*).

Scenes of Country Life (*Scènes de la Vie de Campagne*).

107. The Peasants (*Les Paysans*).* 108. The Country Doctor (*Le Médecin de Campagne*). 109. *The Justice of the Peace* (*Le Juge de Paix*). 110. The Village Curé (*Le Curé de Village*). 111. *The Purlieus of Paris* (*Les Environs de Paris*).

* Left incomplete.—Ed.

THE HUMAN COMEDY

SECOND PART

PHILOSOPHIC STUDIES (*Études philosophiques*)

112. *The Phœdon of To-day* (*Le Phédon d'aujourd'hui*). 113. The Wild Ass's Skin (*La Peau de Chagrin*). 114. Jesus Christ in Flanders (*Jésus-Christ en Flandres*). 115. Melmoth Reconciled (*Melmoth réconcilié*). 116. Massimilla Doni (*Massimilla Doni*). 117. The Unknown Masterpiece (*Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*). 118. Gambara (*Gambara*). 119. The Quest of the Absolute (*La Recherche de l'Absolu*). 120. *Chief-justice Fritot* (*Le Président Fritot*). 121. *The Philanthropist* (*Le Philanthrope*). 122. A Child Accursed (*L'Enfant maudit*). 123. Adieu (*Adieu*). 124. The Maranas (*Les Marana*). 125. The Conscript (*Le Réquisitionnaire*). 126. The Executioner (*El Verdugo*). 127. A Seashore Drama (*Un Drame au Bord de la Mer*). 128. Master Cornelius (*Maître Cornélius*). 129. The Red Inn (*L'Auberge rouge*). 130. About Catherine de' Medici (*Sur Catherine de Médicis*): (I) The Calvinist Martyr (*Le Martyr calviniste*). 131. (II) The Confession of the Ruggieri (*La Confession des Ruggieri*). 132. (III) The Two Dreams (*Les deux Rêves*). 133. *The New Abelard* (*Le nouvel Abeilard*). 134. The Elixir of Long Life (*L'Élixir de longue Vie*). 135. *The Life and Adventures of an Idea* (*La Vie*

et les Aventures d'une Idée). 136. The Exiles (*Les Proscrits*). 137. Louis Lambert (*Louis Lambert*). 138. Séraphita (*Séraphita*).

THIRD PART

ANALYTIC STUDIES (*Études analytiques*)

139. *A Study of Teachers* (*Anatomie des Corps enseignants*). 140. The Physiology of Marriage (*Physiologie du Mariage*). 141. *The Pathology of Social Life* (*Pathologie de la Vie sociale*). 142. *A Monograph on Virtue* (*Monographie de la Vertu*). 143. *Philosophic and Political Dialogue on the Perfection of the Nineteenth Century* (*Dialogue philosophique et politique sur la Perfection du XIXe Siècle*).

The English titles in italics belong to those works which Balzac did not have time to write, and it will be seen that they are rather numerous. On the other hand, it will be noticed that at least two of his masterpieces, *Cousin Bette* and *Cousin Pons* (*Le Cousin Pons*), which, in fact, date, respectively, only from 1846 and 1847, do not appear on this programme. Should we then regret that he was not able to realise it? And ought we to con-

sider it a great loss to French letters that all he has given us of the *Scenes of Military Life* reduces itself to *The Chouans* and that very mediocre short story, *A Passion in the Desert?* What an admirable subject this would have been for declamation! *The Plain of Wagram*, *The Battle of Dresden*, *The Campaign of France*—what subjects, one might say, from the pen of a Balzac! And why must jealous fate have left it to the genius of a Tolstoi to write the novel of war? Yes; but, on the other hand, one cannot help noticing that the very nomenclature of the *Scenes of Military Life*—which begins with *The Soldiers of the Republic*, in 1793, to end with *The Algerian Pirate*, in 1830—has something very systematic about it, which does not pertain so much to the personal and living inspiration of the novelist as it does to the obligation which he imposed upon himself of filling out the whole compass of his plan. It was necessary that there should be, in his *Comedy*, scenes of military life, *because* military life is one side of contemporary life; and, in these scenes of military life, it was necessary that the Republic, the Empire, and the Restoration should each have its share, *because* the society which he describes lived between 1792 and 1835. There is a good deal of the artificial about that!

Again, in like manner—in the *Scenes of Private Life—The Children, A Young Ladies' Boarding-school,* and *Inside Life at College* were to appear for this sole reason, not, perhaps, because the novelist was very keenly interested in these subjects, but *because* education is one of the problems of contemporary life, and because Balzac, about 1840, became aware that, in his *Louis Lambert,* he had scarcely touched upon this problem. Let me attribute to the same scruple, and to the same plan, *A Study of Teachers.* And, assuredly, since it was thus that he had planned his monument, "without the omission of . . . anything belonging to childhood, old age, or middle age", we can feel only grateful to him for having wished it to be complete, or conformable to the idea that he had conceived of it. One's only fear is that he would have run the risk of altering the nature of the idea itself, under pretence of making it more rigorously exact than it allowed of being made. Instead of being organic and living, as it was in its first form, the solidarity which links together the parts of his work would have become perhaps more apparent, but certainly more artificial, as it became geometrical and logical. The architectural proportions would have been outwardly realised only at the expense, if I

may so express it, of the proper and intrinsic quality of the materials. Narratives learnedly and painfully documented, but possibly wearisome, like his *Employees*, would have alternated with many masterpieces spontaneously sprung from poetic inspiration; and although the intense life of these masterpieces themselves would not, of course, have been decreased by these narratives, yet, since one thing depends on another, I do not know whether the total effect of *The Human Comedy* would not in some respects have been made less striking thereby. After all, "God does well what he does"! and I will not use the hackneyed expression, and say that Balzac died at the right time for his fame; but neither will I say the contrary; and, taking his work as it is, I will not regret that death did not allow him, while "striving to mend, to mar the subject".

But it will now be better understood why, in order to judge and analyse his work, I shall not endeavour to present it in its chronological sequence. It will be found, as a matter of fact, that Balzac wrote nothing superior to *Cousin Pons* and *Cousin Bette*, which were respectively written, as I have just said, the second in 1846, and the first in 1847. The general idea which connects them—that of the dark and secret dramas which are bred within families

through inequality of conditions, between people of the same name, blood, and origin—is one of the most fruitful in pathetic subjects, and in subjects whose social bearing equals or exceeds their romantic interest. But *The Quest of the Absolute*, written in 1834, and *Eugénie Grandet*, in 1833, seem to me inferior in nothing—although they are not as voluminous—to *Cousin Bette* or *Cousin Pons;* and certainly, as an expression or representation of what Balzac wished to portray in them, they are the equal of these. During a period of eighteen years of strenuous production, Balzac, good or bad, was, properly speaking, neither below nor above Balzac.

For instance, it was in 1842, shortly after the publication of *A Bachelor's Establishment*, another of his masterpieces, that he "spoiled", if I may so phrase it, for good and all, *A Woman of Thirty*, which he had begun so felicitously in 1831. And the reason for this is the same. Through the explanations I have given, and even without them, if one has begun to perceive Balzac's imaginative nature, one must have realised that the publication of his works, one after another, had nothing in common with their real chronology. This has been seen in the case of *César Birotteau*, and I have called attention to it; and had he

lived, and had he published, about 1850 or 1852, *The Battle* or *The Boisrouge Heirs*, his letters to Madame Hanska are evidence that he would then have carried them in his mind for about twenty years, since he mentions them as early as 1834. There is also a *Sister Mary of the Angels* (*Sœur Marie des Anges*), the manuscript of which, he informs his publisher Werdet in this same year 1834, is completed. He even writes to him for the sole purpose of requesting him to come for this manuscript to Nemours, whither he has fled from his creditors; yet *Sister Mary of the Angels* never appeared. Some one else may, if he chooses, clear up the mystery. But the thing I wish particularly to say is that, reckoning from 1832 or 1833 at the latest, and beginning with *The Chouans*—or *The Wild Ass's Skin*, which I would ascribe to his first manner—the whole work of Balzac being confusedly contemporaneous in his mind, we also, in order to appreciate it, must have it as a whole, and at the same time, before our eyes.

No one understood or expressed this better than George Sand, whose evidence, others will agree with me in thinking, has in this instance particular importance and authority:

"And I also, with the critics, when I read, one by one and day by day, these extraordinary books, did not like them all. Some shocked

my convictions, my tastes, my sympathies. At one time I said, 'It is too long,' and at another, 'It is too short.' Some seemed to me to be fantastic, and made me ask myself, with vexation, 'What is their purpose? Of what use are they? What do they mean?'

"But when Balzac, finding at last the key of his destiny, the answer to the enigma of his genius, seized upon this admirable and profound title, *The Human Comedy;* when, after efforts of painful and ingenious classification, he made from all the parts of his work a logical and profound whole—each one of these parts, even those I had least enjoyed at the outset, acquired, in my eyes, its value in fitting into its place. Each of these books is, in fact, a page from one great book, which would be incomplete if he had left out that important page. The classification he had undertaken was to be the work of the rest of his life; accordingly, it is not yet perfect; but, such as it is, it embraces so many horizons that we come very near viewing the whole world from the coign of vantage where it places us."

I will also refrain, in this connection, from an inveterate but somewhat painful habit to which critics are addicted—I will not undertake, in characterising Balzac's novels, to compare him with the novelists who were his con-

temporaries. Sainte-Beuve wrote, just after the novelist's death, in his *Monday Chats* (*Causeries du Lundi*): "In a work more complete, and of freer scope, one would have to graduate and fix clearly the true relations between M. de Balzac's talent and that of his most celebrated contemporaries, Madame Sand, Eugène Sue, and Alexandre Dumas. In a totally different style, but with a view of human nature which is neither more favourable nor more flattering, M. Mérimée might be taken as his opposite in tone and manner, as a contrast." This is precisely what I think should not be done. It should not be done, because Balzac's novels are not isolated narratives, of which each one is sufficient unto itself, or capable of being judged or appreciated independently, and as it were exclusively, when separated from the whole of which they form part. This reason, which was an excellent one in 1850, is to-day, after the lapse of half a century, still better. But it should not be done; *Eugénie Grandet* must not be compared with *Carmen*, or *The Poor Relations* (*Les Parents pauvres*) * with *The Wandering Jew* (*Le Juif errant*)—any more than we compare Molière's

* The collective title of *Cousin Bette* and *Cousin Pons*. —Ed.

comedies with the plays of Sedaine or Diderot —because *Carmen* and *Eugénie Grandet*, *The Poor Relations* and *The Wandering Jew* are not products of the same intention, or, as I shall show, of the same system of art. Or, rather, *The Poor Relations* and *Eugénie Grandet* proceed, in truth, from no system of art, but from a general intention of "representing life", even at the expense of what, until Balzac, had been called by the name of art; and, therefore, to judge or appreciate them, one can "compare" them only with life.

And, for the same reason, I do not attach to the question of Balzac's "style" the importance which I perceive is still accorded it in our day. Balzac's style—whose defects I believe I know as well as any one, from having formerly exaggerated them to myself, under the influence of Flaubert's rhetoric—this style, whatever may be said of it, is "alive", with singular life, after the manner of the style of Saint-Simon, for instance; and what more can we ask of a writer whose great ambition was to "compete with the *état civil*"? It may be, besides, that the very notion of "style", like many other things and together with them, has undergone an evolution in the last hundred and twenty-five years. It may be that, in whatever way he expresses it, a good writer is simply one who says

all he wants to say, who says only what he wants to say, and who says it exactly as he wants to say it. That is not always the case with Balzac. But, once more, that is only a secondary consideration, a question of grammar or rhetoric; the real point is to know whether the removal of some of the defects which are criticised in Balzac's style would not also, in a manner, remove from his novels the life that abounds in them. I shall try further on to answer this question.

Meanwhile, and to appreciate the real worth of Balzac's novels, leaving aside all that would guide and help me equally well in appreciating, for instance, the novels of George Sand, I must endeavour to ascertain and indicate their proper, original, and wholly singular merit. That is what I am going to try to do in attempting to state their exact historical significance—to show how in them true observation blends with inventive genius—and, finally, to make clear their social meaning or bearing.

CHAPTER IV

THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BALZAC'S NOVELS

It might be argued, without exaggeration or paradox, that, of all novels, the only ones which have no verified documentary or historical value are precisely those which pass for historical: Walter Scott's *Quentin Durward*, for instance; or Alfred de Vigny's *Cinq-Mars;* or Eugène Sue's *Latréaumont*. "*Quentin Durward*, a novel which is admired especially for what is historical in it, made Honoré very angry; contrary to the multitude, he considered that Walter Scott had strangely disfigured Louis XI., a king as yet ill understood, in his opinion". Thus Madame Surville expresses herself in her monograph on her brother. But he himself, in his turn, writes to Madame Hanska, in a letter dated January 20, 1838: "Sue has a narrow and bourgeois mind, incapable of understanding such greatness [that of Louis XIV. and his time]; he lives only on the crumbs of the vulgar and commonplace evils of our pitiful existing society. He felt himself crushed by the gigantic aspect of the grand age, and took

revenge by slandering the finest and greatest epoch of our history, a period dominated by the powerful and productive influence of our greatest king." Thus it is that one may always contest or discuss the historical value of an "historical" novel; and who knows whether Balzac's Catherine de' Medici, in *The Confession of the Ruggieri*, is truer to life than Walter Scott's Louis XI., in his *Quentin Durward*, or Eugène Sue's Louis XIV., in his *Latréaumont?* I should take good care not to vouch for it.

But a contemporary novel, even one in which the novelist shall have undertaken, not to portray the manners of his time and still less to "satirise" them, but simply to tell a story, and—as Molière said—to "please", without any other or more ambitious object — this novel, whatever it may be worth in all other respects, and even if it be worth nothing, will always and necessarily have some historical or documentary value; such, for example, is the case with the novels of him who has sometimes been called "the best of Balzac's pupils", Charles de Bernard du Grail, the author of *A Woman of Forty* (*La Femme de quarante Ans*). The reason for this is that one cannot please one's contemporaries without flattering their tastes in some way—we know that there is a way of flattering them even in opposing, or pre-

tending to oppose them; and how could these tastes be opposed or flattered unless they were portrayed? There is therefore no novel which is not, in a certain measure, a "document" on the spirit of the time with which it is contemporary; which does not bear witness or evidence either in favour of or against that time, even independently of any such intention on the part of the novelist; and, in that sense, to praise Balzac's novels for their historical or documentary value will seem no great encomium.

But a distinction should be made. No more in history or in art than in matters of law have all evidences the same value or authority. All documents are not of the same rank. The fertile mind of Abbé Prévost produced some twenty novels: I can name only three, beginning with *Manon Lescaut*, which have a positive historical value. They are fully of their time, but they express nothing, or almost nothing, of that time; and that is what distressed Taine, that neither in *The Memoirs of a Man of Quality* nor in *Cléveland* could there be found any information on the history of manners in France in the eighteenth century. Prévost's novels are of their time, as are Madame Cottin's, if you like, or as are most of George Sand's—that is to say, in as far as one

cannot help "being of one's time", even though one wishes not to be. And, indeed, one should neglect none of them—I include also Madame Cottin's—in a study of the evolution of literary sensibility in the last two hundred years! They are, and they will remain, essential documents on the subject. But one understands the term in a different way when one praises Balzac's novels for their "documentary" or historical truth, and one means, literally, that as a whole they are equivalent to "memoirs of use for the history of society in his time". Guizot's *Memoirs*, no doubt, have a merit of another kind; they illuminate no better than *The Human Comedy*, with no clearer, though often with a more glaring light, the innermost history of the fifteen years of the Restoration and the eighteen years of the July Monarchy—and I will add that they illuminate only part of this history.

"My works have their geography as they have their genealogy and families, their places and things, their people and facts," could be read in the introduction to *The Human Comedy;* and this constitutes primarily their historical value. For, indeed, consider, and, if you can, estimate in the works of Balzac's predecessors the space given to provincial France. There is practically none, and our

French novels of the eighteenth century have never been "localised" except in Paris or abroad; in Spain by Le Sage, or in England by Abbé Prévost. But in Balzac's works—he is right in saying it—a whole "geography of France" is to be found, a picturesque and animated geography. For this reason, several of his descriptions of towns and provinces have justly remained celebrated; as, for instance, the description of the small town of Guérande, in *Béatrix*, or that of the country of Fougères, in *The Chouans*. Let me also recall, at the very beginning of *The Quest of the Absolute*, what might be called an analysis, rather than a description, of Flemish manners; and, if one may be allowed to mention it incidentally, let me not hesitate to recognise here the first outlines of a method which was to become that of the historian of Flemish painting, ill-fated Alfred Michiels, and the very method of the illustrious historian of English literature. But it will be better seen, a little further on, how much Taine's criticism owes to Balzac's novels.

It is because, in the eyes of Balzac, romantic description—very different in this respect, and in several others, from poetic description—does not exist in itself, or for itself, as, for instance, Victor Hugo's descriptions in *Notre-*

Dame de Paris do. Poetic description, or especially romantic description, is in itself its own *raison d'être* and object, its own means and end. All that we ask of the poet is to become exalted over the theme which it has pleased him to select; and little do we care, after that, whether the source of this exaltation be in the beauty of the theme or in the intensity of his personal emotion! But Balzac's descriptions always have some *raison d'être* apart from themselves; and since this *raison d'être*, in Balzac's eyes or intention, always serves to explain the causes which in the course of time shaped beings or places, Balzac's descriptions, for that reason alone, are always historical. One may, however, think that they are sometimes not as "explanatory" as he himself believed them to be, and, when that is the case, that they are rather lengthy, not to say endless. Rebel as he may against this criticism, it will not prevent his having more than once deserved it. For, in theory, it is possible that we may be nothing more than creatures of the ambient air or of our native environment; and the thoughts, and especially the feelings, of a man living in Provence are not the same as those of one living in Brittany, nor does one think or feel in the same way in Besançon as in Caen. The

manner of one's life has also its influence, the quality of one's food and the nature of one's drink, beer or wine, Schiedam or whisky; I readily admit it. But, as a matter of fact, it does not appear to be "necessary" that Eugénie Grandet's pathetic story should have happened at Saumur, or that of Balthasar Claës at Douai, rather than at Nérac, for instance, or at Villeneuve-d'Agen. Moreover, those are only questions, or, so to speak, quibbles, of "species", which take away nothing from the intrinsic value of the descriptions. Whether they explain or not, and, in the philosophic sense of the word, whether they "determine" or do not determine the characters of the novelist, Balzac's descriptions are what they are; and if nothing, at the time, was newer than this introduction of the "geography of France" into the novel, it ought to be said to-day that in this art of mixing the local past with the present, and blending them in images not to be forgotten, Balzac, for half a century, has not been surpassed.

For—and it is proper to call attention to this point, without laying stress upon it—other novelists, following his example and in his footsteps, understanding what resources for the novel there were in the depiction of provincial manners, may have succeeded in

giving us a picture, one of his Brittany and another of his Provence, this one of his Flanders and that one of his Languedoc or his native Quercy. But Balzac stands for Brittany and Normandy, for Alençon and Angoulême, for Grenoble and Besançon, for Nemours and Issoudun, for Touraine and Champagne! From 1830 to 1850 "provincial life" in France has had no painter more universal; and to this will it perhaps be said that the likeness of the portraits he gave us is sometimes open to question? Such is not my opinion! But even if one should tarry to discuss this likeness, even if our provinces or towns should refuse to recognise themselves in his *Eugénie Grandet* and his *Ursule Mirouet*, in his *Pierrette* and his *Rabouilleuse*, in his *Béatrix* and his *Vicar of Tours*, the fact would still remain that all these portraits are different from one another; that we receive a very particular impression from each one of them; that this impression becomes, in our recollection, inseparable from its original; and can the sense of history, inasmuch as it is the sense of the diversity of epochs and places, be, will it ever be, anything else or anything more?

It is the same with "epochs" in history as with "styles" in art, which are styles or epochs only because of their differences; and these differences are perceived, and can be perceived,

only in their juxtaposition or order. But what is there beyond these differences, and, furthermore, is there anything beyond them?

This is what I should like to show still better by again taking up a point made by Sainte-Beuve, and running through four or five of Balzac's novels, in the successive order of contemporary history which they illustrate, and of which they are episodes or monuments.

Here, for instance, is *The Chouans* (1829), which is not, I will say at once, one of his good novels, and which, after being in vain remodelled in order to adapt it to the plan of *The Human Comedy*, remains, none the less, a novel after his first manner: I mean, the one which he disclaimed. The reason why *The Chouans* is not one of Balzac's good novels is because it is historical after the manner of Walter Scott's novels. An attempt is made, in that book, to interest us in the "resurrection" of an historical epoch by means of a sentimental subject the romanticism of which exceeds the bounds of probability; and the development of this subject recalls the melodramatic character of *Argow the Pirate* and *The Inheritress De Birague*, even to those who have not read them. In *The Chouans* we meet with ghosts, caves, secret hiding-places "filled with gold"; there are also human beings proof

against bullets, and even against bayonets—as long, at least, as it is necessary to carry the plot to its dénouement. There is also an "enamoured courtesan"—we are in the year 1829—and a "marquis" whose love for his mistress restores to her her maiden innocence. But there is nothing in all that to prevent a few traits from standing out from the tangle of the plot; and, altogether, Balzac did well not to disown *The Chouans*. It is not "positively" a "magnificent poem", as Balzac styled it when he read it over for the last time, in 1843, but "the territory and war are described in it with rare felicity and perfection". And then, more impartial in his first productions than he will be later, Balzac, in *The Chouans*, has wonderfully grasped and expressed the complex nature of this insurrection of the Chouans, in which so many motives that could not be confessed without shame, and that made the uprising useless, mingled with so much disinterestedness; in which on both sides was displayed so much heroism, no doubt, but also so much ferocity; and of which, in truth, the most just thing that can be said is that history has not yet pronounced its verdict thereon.

Let us now pass over an interval of five or six years, 1799–1806, and read *A Dark Affair*

(1841). This fine novel, of which I notice that certain biographers or critics of Balzac speak only in a rather sneering way, is none the less, in my judgment, one of his masterpieces; and it is not sufficient to condemn it to call it a "detective story": such condemnation is too sweeping. "Stories of brigands" have always been liked, not only in France, but in all literatures; and what then is *Les Misérables*, which I see the same judges valuing so highly, but a "detective story"? Is it any the worse on that account? Or, perchance, is it that the drama or novel of a conspiracy is "literary" only inasmuch as the conspiracy dates at least from the time of Louis XIII.? And does it cease to be so, to become what is somewhat contemptuously called "detective", when it is the life of Napoleon which is unfolded therein? These are very singular distinctions!

In my estimation, independently of the mere interest of the plot and the originality of some of the characters, such as that of the steward Michu and of Laurence de Cinq-Cygne, there are three things in *A Dark Affair* which place this novel in the front rank of Balzac's works. In the first place, I am not aware that anywhere, in any other novel, or perhaps in any book of history, has the heavy

atmosphere which was breathed in France from about 1804 to 1812 been better reproduced. One single man stood for the whole of a great country, which lived, or seemed to live, only through the impulse which this man communicated to it. Where he was, there beat the heart of France; and from this centre to its circumference only diminishing and flagging pulsations were transmitted. Men drowsed in the peace of stillness, and all social functions whose object was not to provide the Emperor with money, men, and victories seemed interrupted. Yet under this system of formidable repression—with which, now that it is better understood than in Balzac's day, one could hardly mention any to compare in history—men were watching with cleverly concealed rancour in their hearts, rancour which would not be placated, and which they refrained from manifesting imprudently or prematurely only through fear of not succeeding in their ends; and this also Balzac plainly saw. Perhaps there never was, not even in Rome under the emperors, a more unstable or more menaced power than Napoleon's; and if I should venture to say that one of the reasons for his perpetual wars was the prestige of victory which he felt to be necessary in order to maintain himself upon his

throne, I should be saying nothing that it would not be easy to prove by testimony derived from his most authoritative historians: from M. Frédéric Masson, for instance, in his book on *Napoleon and his Family* (*Napoléon et sa Famille*); or from M. Albert Sorel, in his book on *Europe and the French Revolution* (*L'Europe et la Révolution française*). And what Balzac saw very well, besides—enlightened, moreover, and well informed, as he was, as M. Thiers might be, by the survivors of the Empire, still numerous in 1840—was the game of a few men, and of some of these very survivors, who, realising that the Empire would not last forever, or even for a long time, were chiefly anxious, while serving it, to bring about its fall, and, if it fell, to make it fall in a way which would be useful to them and even advantageous.

Let us, therefore, with Balzac, class *A Dark Affair* under the *Scenes of Political Life*, and if we must needs call it a "detective story", because the police do actually play their part in it, let us then say that a detective story, when it is by Balzac and has for its name *A Dark Affair*, surpasses in interest, as well as in historic importance, novels much more "distinguished", perhaps, such as *Adolphe*, for instance, and such as *Obermann*. But what it is in addition, as compared with *The Chouans*, is

a development, a continuation, an expressive and representative portrait of a precise and determinate historical epoch, whose characters and colours it reproduces for us, together with its special atmosphere. And, to complete the resemblance with one last stroke, Balzac, in an admirable scene, willed to bend the pride of Laurence de Cinq-Cygne before the prestige of him who, that very evening, was preparing to win on the next day the battle of Jena, since the Emperor was one of those men from whose personal influence one can hardly free oneself, and with whom one should not come into personal contact at the start, or whom one should never approach, if one wishes to maintain towards them the freedom of one's ill-will, hatred, and judgment.

What now shall I say of *César Birotteau* (1837), and where shall we find a more lifelike picture of the first years of the Restoration? Does not the title of the novel, in itself alone, sum up beforehand a whole epoch: *Grandeur and Downfall of César Birotteau, Dealer in Perfumery, Deputy-mayor of the Second Ward of Paris, Knight of the Legion of Honour?* If, indeed, one might venture to say of *A Dark Affair* that hardly any one but a magistrate could unravel its plot, this critical eulogy could never be paid to *César Birotteau;* for here is

a novel in which, it might be maintained, nothing whatever takes place; and, without any doubt, before the revolution in the novel brought about by Balzac this would have been said! César Birotteau, having invented the "double paste of sultanas" and the "carminative water", made a fortune; then, because he wanted to go too fast, César Birotteau was ruined; and, in truth, that is the whole novel. How, with such a subject, in which there is no more plot than there are characters out of the usual and even commonplace run; where one sees no violent passions let loose, where even love has nothing about it, so to speak, but what is calm, reasonable, and bourgeois; in which all the characters are people of humble means, and where, finally, the catastrophe consists only in a failure in business—how could Balzac construct such a novel as *César Birotteau?* That is precisely what I am trying to explain, and when I shall have succeeded, if I do succeed in doing it, the present study will be ended. But, for the present, I wish to point out only the historical value of its representation; and, doubtless, never was the adaptation of a subject to a fixed epoch more perfect. The whole Restoration, reduced to the proportions of what is called a *genre* picture, is indeed to be found here. If he were older by

some twenty years, César Birotteau would not be César, but Ragon, his predecessor at the sign of "The Queen of Roses"; and if twenty years younger, he would be his own successor, the triumphant Crevel.

We progress five or six years more, in the history of the century, with *La Rabouilleuse* (1842), which is certainly not the most "moral" of Balzac's novels, but which is undoubtedly one of his most "naturalistic" and, especially and deservedly, one of his most admired. For I share this admiration! Only, while what is most admired in this novel—since Taine, in his *Essay on Balzac* (*Essai sur Balzac*), gathered, as it were, and concentrated all its features under the amplification of his style—is the character of Philippe Bridau, one of the most odious and complete "monsters" of *The Human Comedy*, wherein there are so many, and while I do not deny that this Bridau is indeed one of Balzac's most vigorous creations—and I assent to all that Taine may have said of him—there is also something else which I appreciate in *A Bachelor's Establishment*. I am no less interested in Major Gilet, the dreaded tyrant of Issoudun, or in Captain Giroudeau, than in Colonel Bridau himself. The barely outlined silhouettes of Trooper Carpentier, Gunner Mignonet, Captain Potel, and Captain Renard

are not indifferent to me. I like to imagine from them what the *Scenes of Military Life* might have been. And, in fact, these are three or four biographies whose fortuitous and diverse occurrences throw a singular light on another aspect of the Restoration.

At the same time that men of the Birotteau stamp were making their fortunes, what indeed became of those colonels of twenty-five, retired on half-pay, whose very promotions, earned on the last fields of battle of the Empire, were contested, and who, from the height of their ambitions, exalted by the example of such marshals as Ney or Murat, whose histories they knew, had been hurled, so to speak, by peace into the regularity of civil life? If a few among them, imitating their great chiefs, rallied around the Bourbons, and continued to serve their country under the white flag, others cast off all military spirit upon laying aside their uniform, and became nondescript government officials, adapting themselves as well as they could to the new times. But others still, dignifying with the name of fidelity to the great man their blustering incapacity to submit to any rule, paraded from one café to another their military-cut frock-coats and insulting remarks, their ribbons of the Legion of Honour and unsated appetites. Major

Gilet and Colonel Bridau are scamps of that sort. Some remnants of military virtues—physical bravery, presence of mind in the face of danger, decisiveness, a contempt for life which, besides, goes very well with the firm purpose of getting out of life, as long as it lasts, all the enjoyment one can—serve only to conceal in them the worst and most dangerous of vices. Such men characterise an epoch. Their vices or appetites may well belong to all times; their manner of indulging them belongs to a certain period. They especially express or represent an ensemble or concurrence of circumstances which have been seen only once, whose "creatures" they began by being before becoming their "expression". And perhaps, instead of "creatures", I ought to say "products", if possibly this word expresses better what in them belongs, not to them, but to the "moment" and, as we say, the "atmosphere" in which they evolved; and this completes with precision their historical significance. The two or three military biographies in *A Bachelor's Establishment* are "documents" of the first rank, and, to say all I think of them, I doubt whether any more authentic or interesting records are to be found in the archives of the War Office. Biographies of civilians, no less interesting, and which com-

plete the picture of that epoch, are those of the commissary of stores Du Bousquier, in *The Old Maid*, or, again, that of Baron Sixte du Châtelet, in *Lost Illusions*.

Again, there is the same historical value in the last but one of Balzac's great novels: I mean *Cousin Bette* (1846); and, in this respect, I know of nothing more instructive than the comparison of the character of Crevel with that of César Birotteau. Birotteau kept his vanity within the bounds of his profession; it may even be said that he delighted in it; he was happy to be somebody "in the perfumery business"; and although, of course, this successful perfumer had no small opinion of himself, yet he bowed down, even with a sort of pride, to those who were "socially his superiors"; and, even in his fortune, he realised what was lacking in himself. But precisely what Crevel lacks is the consciousness that anything is or can be lacking in himself! And who were those "socially his superiors" to whom this bourgeois should bow down, since he and his peers, after 1830, and in three days, had all become socially equal? And, indeed, who is there above a Liberal bourgeois of 1840, a "self-made" man, one of whom it may be said that his success is a proof of his merit, his fortune a guarantee of his intelligence, the con-

sideration in which he is held a testimony of the value which other men attach to all he possesses, a man who has only to make a sign in order to become, under the name of "deputy", a fraction of the sovereign of his country, and whom the selling by wholesale of "carminative water" or "Macassar oil" has made equal to all the tasks under which formerly men like Turgot and Colbert, Mazarin and Richelieu, gave way? Such a bourgeois is Crevel; and Balzac never drew a portrait of more speaking likeness, or one which is less a caricature in what, in places, seems extreme, or in which is condensed or epitomised with more truth the history of a whole generation. "The Queen of Roses" is still "The Queen of Roses", but a whole transformation has been accomplished between César Birotteau's day and Célestin Crevel's; *Cousin Bette* is an episode of that transformation. And in the narrative of that episode there are many other things, but nothing more remarkable than the saliency and striking truth of the traits by which, in opposition to all his predecessors, Balzac asserts himself to be, if one may so venture to speak, a contemporary of his own times. The Monarchy of July lives anew in *Cousin Bette*, as the happy years of the Restoration live again in *César Birotteau*, and as in *The Chouans* the spirit of the Revolution is once more brought to life.

The reader perhaps sees what I mean by laying stress on the properly historical significance of Balzac's novels, and how this kind of historical narrative differs in character from Walter Scott's novels, even while it proceeds from them. But need one go any further, and ought any such importance to be attached to Balzac's historical judgments, in themselves, as is given to Guizot's, for instance, or even Michelet's, on the Revolution, the Empire, or the Restoration? Such is the opinion of a few fervid Balzacians, and, if we are to believe them, some hundred pages of *The Country Doctor* (1833)—in the chapter entitled *The People's Napoleon* (*Le Napoléon du Peuple*)—contain as much truth as the twenty volumes of Thiers's *Consulate and Empire* (*Le Consulat et l'Empire*). Mention is also made of the conversations of statesmen, the Rastignacs and De Marsays, in *The Human Comedy*, one of the most curious being that which serves as postscript to *A Dark Affair*. But I think that only shows how prone we are to confuse literary forms! And if, instead of being admirable novels, *Cousin Bette* and *A Bachelor's Establishment* were true "histories", how much good, I mean how much honour, does one think would redound to Balzac on that account? Are we then, while affecting independence of

mind, still slaves to the categories of ancient rhetoric? Do we still believe, with it, that the novel is an "inferior form"? And, even when the Balzac novel is in question, do we imagine that we enhance, in a measure, its merit by correlating it at one time with "drama" or at another with "history", when, on the contrary, its real originality—and this whole study tends only to prove it—is that it equals or fulfils the proper definition of the novel? Balzac's novels are not history, or, above all, "historical novels"; but they have an historical significance, value, and scope, and this value is what it ought to be in order that, though historical, and in this manner, they may still be novels.

What one may be allowed to add is that, since a new method of writing history has been sanctioned among us, this value appears to be more fully determined and to increase. All the memoirs on the Revolution and the Empire that have been published for some fifty years since have been like so many "proofs in support" of the divinations or inductions of the great novelist. But when to the material contained in memoirs are added the results of searches and researches carried on in the archives, then it is that one may with reason be astonished at the exactness and depth of Balzac's "historical sense".

While writing this, I am thinking of certain stories which M. Ernest Daudet has lately collected in a volume having for its title *The Police and the Chouans under the First Empire* (*La Police et les Chouans sous le premier Empire*), and of M. G. Lenôtre's *Tournebut*. In the first will be found the authentic and, in a manner, official history of the abduction of Senator Clément de Ris, which history is the fundamental theme of *A Dark Affair;* and *Tournebut* is nothing else but the complete and detailed account of that affair which Balzac summed up in *The Seamy Side of Contemporary History*. One may convince oneself, in this connection, of the considerable part played by the "police" in politics, during the first fifty years of the century which has just closed; and perhaps it will be deemed that the detective methods employed by Balzac's police do less honour to the fertility of his imagination than to the accuracy of his observation. But it will be seen, especially, how Balzac initiated in his day this novel manner of treating history. And, perhaps, others will be as astonished as I am that several of those who owe to him alone this knowledge and art should have repaid their indebtedness by crediting it, by preference, to Stendhal and the brothers De Goncourt.

"If one fully grasps the meaning of this composition," we read, further, in the introduction to *The Human Comedy*, "it will be admitted that I give to constant, daily, secret or patent facts, to the acts of individual life, and to their causes and principles, as much importance as historians have hitherto attached to the events in the public life of nations. The unknown battle which takes place in a valley of the Indre, between Madame de Mortsauf and love (*The Lily of the Valley*), is perhaps of as much importance as the most illustrious of known battles." And, according to his habit when he speaks of himself, he exaggerates! Between the battle which is fought in the heart of Madame de Mortsauf and, I do not say the "most illustrious", but the least famous of "known battles" there will always be this difference, that the least famous of known battles interrupted or changed thousands of human destinies, while, after all, the defeat or victory of Madame de Mortsauf over herself and her love concerned only herself and that big noodle of a Félix de Vandenesse. It is not I who call him a "big noodle": it is Madame de Manerville, to whom Balzac had been imprudent or conceited enough to send the manuscript of *The Lily of the Valley*. But let us not carp at his choice of example. Instead

of *The Lily of the Valley*, we will suppose he is speaking of *Cousin Bette;* and let us understand what Balzac meant.

He believed, because he had observed, that our actions, even when they are public, always are, as it is said to-day, "conditioned" by the circumstances of our private life. He believed that the causes which, in a given case, determine one man's actions in one way, and another man's in another way, are generally more firmly and deeply implanted than we think, and do not depend so much on the hour or the circumstance as on the long premeditation of the actors, an unconscious premeditation, but not on that account wholly or exactly involuntary. "I felt myself pressed onward by an internal force, which I could not resist.—Let us look into this a little, and see whether the direction you gave to your life has not had for its object to make this force irresistible." If this is really the way in which the question of historical determinism presents itself to-day, ought we not to recall that it has already been thus presented in Balzac's novels? And if it be easy to show, as I shall show, that it is from Balzac alone, and no other, whether philosopher or historian, that a whole modern school has borrowed this conception of history, is not that a

further proof, if one were needed, of his deep historical sense?

But the historical value of a novel such as *Cousin Bette* or *César Birotteau* does not constitute its sole merit, and if they were superior only in this respect to so many other novels—to *Mauprat* or *Marianne*, let us say—would they be the novels they are? For my part, I believe they would, and I have just attempted to state for what reasons. "Resemblance to life" is only, if you like, one merit in a novel, but it is an essential, or, rather, *the* essential merit. I hope that this point is now sufficiently clear. And if Balzac's novels certainly have other qualities, I hope that, in the following chapter, the connection between these other qualities and this fundamental and indispensable quality will be fully seen. The literary or æsthetic value proper of the Balzac novel is nothing but an extension of what I have termed its historical significance.

CHAPTER V

THE ÆSTHETIC VALUE OF BALZAC'S NOVELS

Are there qualities which may be properly termed "literary"; whose presence or realisation is sufficient to differentiate a literary work from one which is not literary; qualities apart from which there may be all the merits you please, but nothing literary? It was thought so formerly ; and Balzac himself was not far from believing it when, in a very curious sentence quoted by me above, after having declared that George Sand had neither "the strength of conception", nor "the gift of constructing a plot", nor "the faculty of arriving at the truth", nor "the art of pathos", he added that, on the other hand, she had "style"; and this quality, above all others reputed "literary", was enough for her to become in truth George Sand, that is to say, the only novelist whose popularity, about 1838, equalled or surpassed his own. But, in addition, did not Balzac seem to imply, in so saying, that such qualities as "the gift of constructing a plot" or "the art of pathos" were so many essentials of the novel, without which

he would fain have claimed that one might be —precisely as was George Sand—a very great writer, but not a great novelist? Therefore, in Balzac's eyes, "literary" qualities exist. There are general ones, such as style, and others peculiar to such and such a form; there are some which are common to all writers, such as "the gift of constructing a plot", and others peculiar to the poet, the playwright, or the novelist. If one were to examine in what proportion he realised, in his *Human Comedy*, those qualities peculiar to the novelist, it would not, therefore, be acting treacherously towards him; and, after all, he would be judged according to his principles, if one studied in turn, in his works, "the strength of conception", "the faculty of arriving at the truth", and "the art of pathos".

It might be, it would be said, in that case, that Balzac's "conceptions" are sometimes admirable—admirable for their strength, as, for instance, in *Old Goriot* or *A Dark Affair*, and admirable for their simplicity, as in *Eugénie Grandet* or *César Birotteau*—but they are at times strange, not to say extravagant, as for instance, in *A Woman of Thirty*, and sometimes quite coarse, as in *The Last Incarnation of Vautrin*. Which of the two is a conception of the more exaggerated romanti-

cism: Jacques Collin, alias Trompe-la-Mort, or Edmond Dantès, Count of Monte-Cristo? *The Petty Bourgeois* is another very extraordinary conception! From another point of view, one of Balzac's finest novels, *Ursule Mirouet* (1841), is completely spoiled by the intervention of "mesmerism", or "magnetism", in the action; and I would rather say nothing of *The Wild Ass's Skin* (1831), *Louis Lambert* (1832), and *Séraphita* (1834). Only I ought to recall that Taine considered that the ending of *Séraphita* was "as beautiful as a canto from Dante"!

It might further be said that in some of his novels, such as *The Quest of the Absolute*, *The Lily of the Valley*, *Albert Savarus* (1842), and even *Cousin Pons*, Balzac carried "the art of pathos" almost as far as it is possible to carry it. By whatever means he attained it, and frequently, it must be admitted, by means or contrivances which might be called not very "literary", the intensity of emotion to be met with in Balzac's great novels is often extraordinary. But let me be sincere, and, above all, just towards Dumas and Sue: is not the intensity of emotion also extraordinary in some parts of *The Mysteries of Paris* (*Les Mystères de Paris*) and even of *Monte-Cristo?*

And, doubtless, it might finally be said that if

"the faculty of arriving at the truth" is neither the last nor the least of the qualities peculiar to the novelist, no one, assuredly, in his time or since—I venture to say it without further delay—possessed it in the same degree as Balzac. This is precisely what has just been made clear in what I said of the "historical significance" of his works; and I think that it will presently be made still more evident. But what would be the result of all these observations, which it would be easy to follow up and explain—and which, besides, have been made twenty times over? And, even if they were manifestly accurate and wonderfully profound, would they not still be defective in this respect, that, neither "the art of pathos", nor "the faculty of arriving at the truth", nor "the strength of conception", nor even "the gift of constructing a plot" being characteristic and determining factors in the novel—I mean, not any more than they are in drama or comedy—it would not, or it would hardly, be the novelist whom I should have revealed in the works of Balzac?

I must be forgiven for returning to this point and laying stress upon it, since, to tell the truth, I should not have undertaken this study if this were not its *raison d'être* and, in my eyes, its most interesting aspect. Balzac's

novels are *different* from the novels of his predecessors; and if they are *different*, it is especially in this, that they are neither comedy nor drama—that is, in a manner "narrated", instead of being "written for the stage". If, then, neither the soundness of the "plans" nor "the strength of conception" is a merit peculiar to the novel, and, so to speak, an essential part of its definition, then I myself shall not have said anything essential to my subject if all that I find worthy of praise in Balzac is his "strength of conception" and the soundness of his "plans". I wish to say something else of him, and I wish to do so because I ought. I may, then, in passing, compare his Grandet to Molière's Harpagon—a thing which, besides, has been done unsparingly—and why not compare his ambitious men to those of Corneille? All of Corneille's ambitious men did not aspire to a crown, and those of Balzac aspire no less to power than they do to fortune. But such comparisons are always futile. They do not get to the bottom of the question. And I know that it is difficult to "get to the bottom of things": we only skim over the surface of everything! But it is, however, as "novels" that we must attempt to characterise Balzac's novels, and I can conceive of no better way of succeeding in this than to judge them by

those qualities or defects which appear to me to belong solely to the Balzac novel.

This is not to be done by striving to find out what belongs to "romanticism" in his works, especially if, as I believe, what is most "romantic" might also well be what is least Balzacian in them. One can never get wholly away from one's own time, and one must have lived a little in it to be able to portray it. There are therefore in Balzac some traits of the romanticist; there are even several; and it is easy to see, if one takes the trouble to look into it closely, that *The Human Comedy* is contemporaneous with *Ruy Blas*. The choice of certain subjects—I have already pointed out *The Last Incarnation of Vautrin* as an example of this romanticism—the exaggeration of certain characters, the declamatory sensibility which suggested to him the opening pages of *The Lily of the Valley:* "To what talent nourished by tears shall we some day owe the most affecting elegy, the picture of torments silently undergone by hearts whose yet tender roots meet only with hard flint in the domestic soil, whose first shoots are plucked by hateful hands, whose blossoms are nipped by frost at the very moment when they bud?"—all this balderdash, which is not unusual in Balzac, and the "soul-state" which it generally expresses,

and, also, the pretentious and Swedenborgian psychology of *Louis Lambert* and *Séraphita*—this, then, is the part of Balzac's work which belongs to romanticism; and neither Balzac nor romanticism has any reason to be proud of it.

But, after having said so much, I will say that Balzac, though he was a contemporary of romanticism, and in more respects than one a romanticist himself, accepted nothing from romanticism, if, at least, as one should not weary of repeating, romanticism is the doctrine of art—it matters not if it is a more or less conscious doctrine; it is at all events sufficiently precise—whose historic monuments are, and will remain, the poems of Victor Hugo, the plays of the elder Dumas, and the first novels of George Sand, *Indiana*, *Valentine*, and *Jacques*. In so far as romanticism is chiefly a question of art, I have shown that hardly anything could be more indifferent to Balzac. It is the representation of life which interests him, and not at all the realisation of beauty; as if he understood, somewhat confusedly, that in the matter of art "realisation of beauty" can scarcely be obtained except at the expense of or detriment to accuracy in the transcription of life. As it is with life, so it is with nature, which in itself is neither beautiful

nor ugly; but both are what they are, and, no doubt, what they *ought* to be; and they are either disfigured or embellished, "flattered" or "traduced", only when one begins to misrepresent, in a systematic manner and along given lines, their real relations. Accordingly we see that, through a consequence which is the inevitable result of this doctrine of art, romanticism has always tended towards the representation of the rare or the extraordinary: the heroic brigand, or the courtesan in love, more maidenly in her excesses than any daughter of a virtuous mother. But in this respect again it is impossible to be less romantic than Balzac; and however singular or exceptional by reason of their strength and impressiveness some types which are to be met with in his works may be—Grandet or Bridau, Vautrin or Hénarès, or the Dukes of Soria—these works are essentially a rehabilitation, if I may so speak, of "humble truth", daily truth, of that truth to which even comedy, "vaudeville", and the novel before Balzac had never looked for inspiration, so vulgar did they consider it, except for the purposes of caricature or obvious satire. And lastly, if romanticism consists especially in the display of the writer's ego, or, further, in the systematic reduction of the spectacle of the vast world to

the range of the poet's or novelist's personal vision, who will deny that the whole work of Balzac is, on the contrary, a perpetual effort to subordinate his individual manner of viewing things—a necessarily narrow and "one-sided" manner, inasmuch as it is individual—to the restraint of a reality which, by its very definition, is exterior, anterior, and superior to it? No, Balzac is certainly no romanticist! *The Human Comedy* would not be what it is, if Balzac were a romanticist! And, not being a romanticist, what shall I say he was—in the age of George Sand and Victor Hugo?

He was what we in our day call a "naturalist"; and he was one in every sense of the word, if one will only recall this sentence in the introduction to *The Human Comedy:* "There have existed, and will exist, at all times social species, as there are zoological species." We know, besides, by means of this same introduction, as well as through twenty other passages in his works, that he liked to use the names of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Cuvier as authorities. Note especially, in *The Wild Ass's Skin*, the consultations which his Raphael de Valentin holds with some savants, and, I do not mean the degree of information these consultations indicate, but the intelligent curiosity they betoken. Balzac has further said, in order to

make more precise the nature of his ambition: "Does not society make of man, according to the environments in which his action unfolds itself, as many different kinds of men as there are species in zoology?" And this might be said to be the whole system of Lamarck.

But, after having made this remark, it is, of course, in the æsthetic sense of the word that I call him a "naturalist"; and this word, whatever may have been said of it, has had in literary parlance, since the seventeenth century, a clearly defined meaning. "The belief called *naturalistic*," says a book of that time, "is that which considers as necessary the exact imitation of nature in all things." Let me explain this a little: I shall not be far from having characterised Balzac's novels, if I show how *The Old Maid* and *The Vicar of Tours* are "naturalistic" novels. And I could then go one step, or even two steps, further. It might be shown that Balzac's novels are *novels* only in the degree in which they are naturalistic, and that they classify themselves, I should be tempted to say automatically, according as they meet, with more or less exactness, the requirements of naturalistic art. The great defect of his *Vautrin* lies in its being only a romantic novel.

Balzac's novels are therefore "naturalistic", that is to say, conformable, intentionally and *de facto*, to the reality of life. They are so, in the first place, through the diversity of conditions which they bring on the scene; and, no doubt, to state this to-day amounts to nothing; but if, however, we want to gauge the bearing of this innovation, or revolution, let us think of the novels of his contemporaries, George Sand's, for instance: *Indiana*, *Valentine*, and *Mauprat;* or the short stories of Mérimée: *The Double Misunderstanding* (*La double Méprise*), *Arsène Guillot*, and *The Venus of Ille* (*La Vénus d'Ille*). What is the "condition" of George Sand's characters and of those of Mérimée? They have none, unless to be the hero of a novel is a condition; and one might venture to say that before giving them a place in "literary life", and in order to introduce them there, their authors began by "abstracting" them from real life. What regiment did "Colonel Delmare" command? And what was the nature of the negotiations conducted by the diplomats who appear in Mérimée's short stories? Balzac would certainly have wanted to tell us.

I dwell upon this—and the reader is requested to understand the point clearly. What is the "condition" of Adolphe and Obermann?

of Lord Nevil, in *Corinne?* of René? What do we know about them, and, indeed, what do they know about themselves? What trials tested their worth? What life have they lived? Whence, to be still more precise, do they come by those resources which exempt them, on all occasions, from "reckoning"? And if—I do not say even in our contemporaneous democracies, but in our modern societies, as we have known them for three hundred years—if the necessity of living, *res angusta domi*, if the obligation of providing for the urgent wants which recur every day, if the constraint and return of daily occupations are perhaps the most infallible means of destroying or interrupting the outburst of "overpowering love", at the same time that they thwart the possibility of gratifying it, who does not see and feel that by excluding them from the novel we not only deprive it of an element of interest and diversity, but drain it of its very substance? The representation of what constitutes the daily course of human existence, and which is of as high concern to the great lady in her boudoir as to Birotteau in his counting-house, to the Duke of Chaulieu in his sumptuous mansion as to Eugène de Rastignac in his squalid den at the Vauquer boarding-house, is the first law of a form whose purpose

and principal object are to give an exact copy or representation of life.

Balzac's originality lies in having understood this; and hence, as has already been pointed out, the importance in his works, but especially the particular character, of the money question. It is this character which has not been sufficiently noticed. For others than himself had shown us, before him, how money may be spent, or even procured, after the manner of Le Sage's *picaros*, when one has no means at one's command for earning it honestly. Something of the kind is also to be seen in Dancourt's comedies and in those of Regnard. But Balzac was the first novelist who attempted to tell us how money is made, in how many different ways: by work and economy, after the manner of the Birotteaus, Crevels, and Popinots; by land speculation, as Grandet and Gaubertin made it; or on the Stock Exchange, as did Nucingen; by politics and diplomacy, in the manner of Rastignac; by shameless usury, as Gobseck and Rigou made it; by a rich marriage, as did that ruffianly veteran of a Philippe Bridau; or in the way that the worthy husband of pathetic Eugénie Grandet, Chief-justice Cruchot de Bonfons, did; and at once we see the result. In order to tell us "how money is made", the means of making

it had to be described to us, we must be made to accept them as likely, they had to be "explained" to us by showing us their relations with the mechanism or technique of a profession. Here is how money is made in the drug business (*César Birotteau*), and how a fortune in landed property is acquired (*Eugénie Grandet*). Here is how Madame de Lestorade went about it (*Recollections of Two Young Brides*), and here how the Auvergnat Rémonencq managed it (*Cousin Pons*). There is a whole history of the transformations of the paper business in the third volume of *Lost Illusions*, and a whole theory of "high financiering" in *The House of Nucingen*. There lies the real interest of the money question in the Balzac novel. It particularises the Balzac novel and makes it concrete; it specialises it; and, if I may so speak, it realises it.

For, take away the money question: what would remain of *Eugénie Grandet*, *The Quest of the Absolute*, *Old Goriot*, *The Marriage Contract*, *César Birotteau*, or *Cousin Pons?* But notice, at the same time, that neither in *Cousin Pons*, nor in *Old Goriot*, nor in *The Quest of the Absolute*, nor even in *Eugénie Grandet*, is the money question the main interest. It serves only to impart to the narrative an air of exactness which it would not otherwise have; it

introduces with it, into the domain of the novel, an infinity of details which hitherto had been kept out of it because of their so-called insignificance or vulgarity; and since, after all, these details are life itself, it is for this reason that the resemblance to life and the reality of the work are made all the greater by the space that they, together with the money question and the picture of conditions, occupy.

"My work," said Balzac, in this connection, "has . . . its genealogy and families, its places and things, its persons and facts; . . . it has its book of heraldry, its nobles and bourgeois, its artisans and peasants, its politicians and dandies, its army—in short, its whole world." This is fully seen in the book published some dozen years ago (1893) by two good Balzacians, MM. Anatole Cerfberr and Jules Christophe, which they called the *Repertory of the Human Comedy* (*Répertoire de la Comédie humaine*). The biographies of Balzac's heroes have here been gathered together, as in a dictionary, in alphabetical order, and in running through them one is at first astonished to find that they are so numerous. We are all familiar with some of the principal characters, either typical or symbolical: Rastignac and Vautrin, Grandet and Birotteau, Claës and Old Goriot, Gobseck

and Gaudissart, Madame de Mortsauf and Madame de Lestorade, Agathe Rouget and Flore Brasier, the Viscountess of Beauséant and the Duchess of Langeais. But no one suspected, so to speak, that there were so many other characters, so lifelike, although scarcely outlined, grouped around them. Yes, it is "a whole world", and Balzac was right in saying it; and, I may add, it is a world which the novelists who preceded him had not thought of portraying; or rather, it is a world which, before portraying, and under pretext of portraying it better—that is, it was said, in portraying whatever essential and permanent features it contained—their art systematically stripped of all that might "condition", "particularise", and "localise" it. The novel was only a love-story—"no novel without love," wrote Renan, no more than some twenty years ago; by which, moreover, he showed that he had read neither *César Birotteau*, nor *The Vicar of Tours*, nor *A Dark Affair*, nor *Cousin Pons*, nor *The Peasants*—and as soon as a lover took part in a love-story, he changed from a real man into his character of a lover, or from himself into his ghost, and when the dénouement came, he ceased, on reëntering life, to exist. The novel was but a dream, from which one awoke on coming in contact with reality.

Let me now consider more closely what details, and what kind of details, this portrayal of "conditions" requires or prescribes; and we shall see, in the next place, that it is owing to the abundance, precision, and minuteness of this kind of detail that Balzac's novels are "naturalistic" novels. He explained himself on this point in *The Quest of the Absolute*: "Events of human life, whether public or private, are so intimately bound up with architecture that most observers are able to reconstruct nations or individuals, in exact accordance with their habits, from the remains of their public monuments or from the scrutiny of their domestic relics. Archæology is to social nature what comparative anatomy is to organic nature. A mosaic reveals a whole society, as the skeleton of an ichthyosaurus implies a whole creation. In either case it is a matter of deduction and connection. A cause makes one surmise an effect, as each effect allows one to trace its origin to a cause. The savant thus brings back to life the very germs of ancient times."

The Quest of the Absolute was written in 1834, and I am aware that in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, written in 1831, Hugo had already said something similar about the relations existing between general civilisation and architecture.

But what interests Balzac much more than "public monuments" is "domestic relics"; and that, in truth, means that he is more interested in "archæology" than in "architecture". The proof thereof is to be found in this very novel, *The Quest of the Absolute*, and in the description he gives in it of the furniture of the Claës. He has a taste for inventories, and, speaking of this, it is a pity that in his youth he did not spend some time in an appraiser's office, for the sake of the fine things that might be said about it! It is even related, in this connection, that the "poppy-red drawing-room" which he describes at length in *The Girl with the Golden Eyes* was his own room, or one of his rooms. He also has a taste for descriptions of costumes, and I am not sure that it might not be said that with the documents of *The Human Comedy* it would be easy to reconstitute the very history of fashion between 1820 and 1848. Let me recall, by the way, in the *Recollections of Two Young Brides* (1841), Louise de Chaulieu's first ball-dress; and, in *Cousin Pons*, the description of that old man's spencer, or the rolls of his muslin cravat.

But have these descriptions all the interest and importance which Balzac attributed to them? Are they not sometimes lengthy? Is our manner of dressing so very commensu-

rable with our manner of feeling? If one were dressed as everybody was in 1844, instead of being dressed as they were in 1810, would one no longer be Cousin Pons? And, finally, is Balzac quite sure that every "local state" is what has since been termed a "soul-state"? Whatever answer may be given to all these questions, which are but one, we may rest satisfied that the artistic value of Balzac's descriptions is not, any more than is their historical value, decreased thereby. Even if they were of no use, and had they been placed there only for their own sake, all these details would still be precious, if they are what give to the appearance of men and things that personal note which would be sought for in vain in the novels which preceded Balzac's. After all, should we not like to know how the rooms in which the *Dangerous Liaisons* were enacted were decorated, whether in *grisaille* or *camaïeu?*

For here again—let us not forget it—Balzac was an innovator, and I scarcely know of any novels before his which are "dressed" and "furnished", if I may so speak. Nothing to-day seems more natural to us than to meet, in our novels, with these descriptions of places, furniture, and costumes; and I believe we are right. We are right in believing that the reality, exactness, saliency, and colour of this

kind of description form an essential merit of the novel. Indeed, we want to see the characters in whom we are asked to become interested, and we see them—we know how to see and can see them—only if, from the start, they have been placed in their familiar "environment". Our fathers were more easily satisfied; and these exacting requirements are something new. It is the novelist of *The Human Comedy* who, as it were, incorporated them into the very definition of the novel. Since Balzac, a novel ought, in a way, as a matter of course, to have its interior decoration. Interior decoration—which, no doubt, is the best way, since it is the most natural, of "placing" a novel in space and time—has become a principal element of reality and life in the novel. Others have been praised for introducing into our literature the expression of the "sentiment of nature": Balzac gained for things the right of being "represented". I do not hesitate to say that, of these two innovations, the second, so far as the novel is concerned, is by far the more important.

For—and if I were writing the history of the literature of his time, this is a point which I should have to emphasise—Balzac alone, or almost alone, among all these romanticists by whom he is surrounded, and for whom, as for

Sainte-Beuve, at that date, criticism, or, as for Michelet, history itself, is, properly speaking, only the record or "diary" of their personal impressions—Balzac alone has a thorough sense of that *objectivity* or *impersonality* which ought to go with a work of art of any kind, and more especially with the drama or the novel.

This does not mean that we do not meet Balzac in his novels, or that he never happens to make his gifts as an observer, inventor, or creator serve his own ideas. In truth, though no novel of his could be named which is what is called a "confession", after the manner of *Valentine*, *Delphine*, or *Adolphe*, or a "thesis", after the manner of *The Travelling Journeyman*, or *The Wandering Jew*, or *Les Misérables*, yet, as he proceeds with the course of his narrative, it happens that Balzac draws his inspiration from the adventures of his own life; and he seldom lets pass the opportunity of telling us what he thinks, even about matters which, like his apology for Catholicism in *The Country Doctor*, do not seem to belong necessarily to his subject. Thus it is that in *The Seamy Side of Contemporary History* (1842–1847) he has a few pages of singular lucidity on the power of association. "Association, one of the greatest of social forces, which made the Europe of the Middle Ages, rests upon senti-

ments which, since 1792, no longer exist in France, where the individual has triumphed over the State." There are curious pages in *Cousin Pons*—where, however, they are absolutely uncalled for—on "occultism": those in which he expresses his regret that, instead of founding at the Collège de France chairs of Russian or Chinese, one of cartomancy had not been established. "It is singular that at a time when chairs are being created, in Paris, of Slavic, Manchu, and literatures as *unteachable* as Northern literatures, which, instead of giving lessons, ought to take them, whose occupants go on repeating everlasting articles on Shakespeare or the sixteenth century, the teaching of occult sciences, one of the glories of the ancient University, has not been restored, under the name of anthropology." His sincerity on this subject is attested, besides, by his *Correspondence*, in which he is seen to give Madame Hanska strange advice. And, lastly, he likes to pose not only as the well-informed man, in a multiplicity of digressions which take him rather far from his subject, but also as the reformer, the philosopher, and the man of wit. It is in this last rôle that he is downright unbearable, and even Victor Hugo's humour is no heavier than Balzac's. I refer the reader who may consider this expression too strong

to the biography of Fritz Brünner, son of Gédéon, in *Cousin Pons:* "Here begins the curious history of a prodigal son from Frankfort-on-Main, the most extraordinary and odd event that ever happened in this well-behaved although large city." I do not care much for him, either, when he offers to our view his men of fashion "cravatted in a way to drive the whole of Croatia to despair", or again when he puts on the lips of his Bixiou mots which savour of the tap-room or the editing room of a comic paper. There is in this great novelist the making of a commercial traveller, and really, if one chose to speak his language, it might be said that in order to portray his "Gaudissart the Great" he needed only, without stepping out of doors, to look at himself in the glass.

But I cannot too often repeat—for the distinction is a capital one, although certain critics persist in not taking it into account—that the writer who lets the reader get a glimpse of him in his work, who, to sum it up all in one word, writes with his temperament, is not on that account indulging in "personal literature"; and still less so, undoubtedly, when he makes his talent serve his ideas.

"Personal literature" consists in taking oneself for the more or less apparent subject of

one s work, and, if this is not making an abuse of the right of public confession—since, after all, we see the public, at all times, running after these confessions, false or sincere, as to a fire—it is calling us, unknown readers, to witness the writer's disappointed hopes or miscarried ambitions. That is what Hugo did, even in his *Ruy Blas*, and Vigny did the same thing in his *Chatterton* or his *Stello*, in his *Samson* as well as in his *Moses* (*Moïse*). Let us contrast with them Balzac's declarations in the first preface of *The Lily of the Valley*, which is dated 1836, or even these lines, not so well known, dated 1843, which I take from his correspondence with Madame Hanska: "I have never, since I came into existence, mistaken the thoughts of my heart for those of my mind, and with the exception of a few lines which I wrote only that you might read them (for example, Mademoiselle de Chaulieu's letter expressing her jealousy), of which I was just speaking to you, I never expressed anything whatsoever from my own heart. It would have been the most infamous sacrilege! Likewise, I never portrayed any one whomsoever that I had known, except G. Planche in Claude Vignon, and that was with his consent, and G[eorge] Sand in Camille Maupin, also with her consent. Therefore, never show me, as a rule of conduct in

things pertaining to the heart, anything I ever wrote. What I have in my heart cannot be expressed, and obeys only its own laws."

Personal literature consists also in referring everything to oneself as the centre of the universe—the navel, the ancients called it—and in estimating the worth of things or of men only in proportion to the particular interest they arouse in us, and, as one might say, from the exclusive point of view of our own pleasure or utility. So it was with Alfred de Musset in almost all his work, including his *Lorenzaccio*, and with George Sand, even in her socialistic novels.

And, lastly, personal literature consists in ascribing to objects the appearance that we conceive of them, without trying to rectify it, under the ridiculous pretext that we can never get out of ourselves, and that, all things existing only in the view in which we perceive them, the impressions which they produce in us consequently take all reality from them. This is what Sainte-Beuve did, at least in his *Contemporary Portraits* or in his *Literary Portraits* (*Portraits littéraires*), and what Jules Michelet did in his histories. Balzac does not belong to that school, and whatever part of himself there may be in his *Human Comedy*—recollections of his school-days at Vendôme in his *Louis Lambert*,

reminiscences of his student life in *The Wild Ass's Skin*, the bitterness and rancour of his existence as a man of letters in *A Provincial Great Man in Paris*—if he is Balzac, it is, in part, precisely because he does not belong to that school.

For, say what one will of the genius of the great romanticists—and I myself will stint them, on all other occasions, neither praise nor admiration—the real name of that school was yet one of ignorance and presumption. The great romanticists, in a general way, were not satisfied with holding an exaggerated opinion of themselves, or, as they say, of "believing in themselves", a right which every writer has—and Balzac, as we have seen, had certainly no mean idea of himself—but they believed that their genius, in itself alone, was in some way sufficient for their work; and it is precisely in this that their presumption was equalled only by their ignorance. It may have been very prettily said, at the time, of the celebrated Madame Geoffrin, "that she respected in her ignorance the active principle of her originality". The saying is just as true of George Sand or Victor Hugo as of Madame Geoffrin. I still remember, on this subject, Leconte de Lisle's eloquent indignation, and I liked to hear him say that never in the

history of literature had he met with ignorance to compare with that of the romanticists. And, indeed, outside of "literature" and "politics", in what did romanticists interest themselves in their day? What can be more shallow than the "science" of George Sand, unless it be Victor Hugo's "erudition"? And who would suspect, in reading them, that their productions were contemporaneous with the works of the great naturalists—Cuvier, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Blainville—and with physiologists of the school of Magendie, who revived the science of nature and life, while what Balzac called "archæology", together with linguistics and philology, at the same time renewed our knowledge of the past?

Not so with Balzac, and his intelligent curiosity extended to everything which might interest a man of his time; a hasty and often superficial curiosity, no doubt, but a singularly active curiosity, whose result, while increasing the external resemblance of his work to life, was to give to that work a foundation which might be called, and which I have already called, "scientific". By this I mean that at the same time that they are narratives, most of Balzac's novels are "inquiries", and one is almost compelled to say that they are "collections of documents". His *Cousin Pons*

is in this respect all the more significant, because, having been despatched more rapidly (March–May, 1847) than his other novels, the traces of improvisation are more visible in it than they are elsewhere; and one may seize in it, so to speak, at its origin, Balzac's manner of proceeding, or, to speak more emphatically, his "method".

Independently of the biography of the character who gives his name to the novel—Sylvain Pons, who in time past had won the government prize for music—*Cousin Pons* contains, in fact, no less than five or six complete biographies, namely, those of the banker Brünner, the Auvergnat Rémonencq, the Cibot couple, Doctor Poulain, and the barrister or lawyer Fraisier. Now, it will be noticed that two at least of these biographies—those of the banker Brünner and Doctor Poulain, which are not among the least interesting—are almost foreign or useless to the action. What, then, were Balzac's reasons for relating them?

It was because, in the first place, if all that the banker Brünner and Doctor Poulain do is to appear in the action of the novel, the knowledge we are given of them is not at all useless for the reconstitution of the "environment" which determines the nature of this action. The classic precept, *Semper ad eventum*

festinet, is perhaps a law of drama, but I am not so absolutely convinced of it, either! It is not a law of the novel. Other things, in the novel, several other things, come before rapidity of narrative, and the dénouement ought never to be the reason for the narrative. But, in the second place, these very full biographies are the legitimate and natural manner of proceeding, if there ever was any—the method of which the novelist makes use to "fix" his characters and keep them away from the requirements of his plot or the tyranny of his own imagination. The banker Brünner and Doctor Poulain may have only one gesture to make or a few words to speak, but what they say or do is not, ought not to be, the novelist's "fabrication". And with still more reason is this the case with the Auvergnat Rémonencq or the Cibot woman, who are beings with more elementary instincts. Neither their speeches nor their actions should spring out as does the figure from a jack-in-a-box, but from a whole existence of which they are the extension or normal continuation. This is what gives to the hidden springs of Balzac's novels their incomparable strength. Even when all the elements have not had time to blend, and when, as in *Cousin Pons*, the narrative remains unfinished, "the pieces are good". The docu-

ment subsists; its historic value is secure; and, with a little complaisance or very harmless flattery, this is, once more, what one may be allowed to call the "scientific" character of the Balzac novel.

If, however, it be perhaps thought that, among the "documents" which he has thus collected, the physiological and especially the pathological documents are somewhat plentiful, I do not dissent. And, speaking of this, what a curious list it would make to enumerate the many diseases which Balzac has described—and treated—in his *Human Comedy*, from Old Goriot's serous apoplexy to the "Polish plait" of Mademoiselle de Bournac, in *The Seamy Side of Contemporary History!* Disease interests him: it interests him as a philosopher, because of the revelations it affords us respecting the singularities of human nature—if we only half know those whom we have seen only in perfect health!—and it interests him as a novelist, because of the part it plays in the daily complications of life. How comes it, indeed, that we have been for so long reluctant to give to disease, in art generally, and particularly in the novel, the place which we well know it occupies in real life, and which we give it in history? Balzac won this place for it. And if it be urged that he more than

once misused his medical science, or, rather, took advantage of his right of playing the doctor in a matter with which he had become acquainted only on the day previous, I am willing to agree to that also; but it is, none the less, one more feature of the resemblance of his work to life, and, no doubt, one which brings out most distinctly its "naturalistic" character.

It is not alone that a part of reality—which hitherto had not entered into the definition of the novel—thus finds itself included in it from that time on. But descriptions, or, to use a better word, monographs, of this kind in themselves clearly denote a total change of attitude on the part of the painter towards his model. At last we break away from romanticism, and even, in a certain sense, from classicism. Henceforth the painter will give up his tastes, and, on principle—with full and intended purpose—he will apply himself to represent neither "what he likes" nor what he believes he can "embellish"; but he will reproduce solely "what is", and reproduce it "because it is". Do savants, zoologists—Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Blainville, or Cuvier—make a choice among animals? Do they apply themselves to the study or anatomy of some, while neglecting or disdaining that of others? Are they inter-

ested in some because of their beauty, and in others on account of their usefulness to man? That was also Buffon's point of view, and it enabled him [in speaking of the horse] to write this sentence: "The most noble conquest which man ever made is that of this proud and spirited animal." But it is no longer a question of usefulness or of conquest. We must take things as we find them. Let us understand them, if we can, and try to pierce through the mystery which shrouds them. Let us realise, as we are in duty bound, the relations which they all maintain with one another, and without some knowledge of which we are unable to apprehend them. Let us study them without any foregone conclusion or secret intention, and especially without the pretension of "embellishing" them, as they used to say, formerly, or of amending them, and thus teaching them what they ought to be. The observer's subordination, or, as will soon be said, his entire submission, to the object of his observation is the method which has revived science: Balzac was the first to apply the method in order to revive the art of the drama and the novel. Or, rather, it brings the novel back to its real conditions, which it had been ignoring for two hundred and fifty years; it strikes out from it what survived from its epic origin;

and it makes it possible for it to expand in conformity with a law properly its own, and no longer in accordance with the law which is common to drama or comedy.

From this result certain consequences, and one of the first is that—without becoming absolutely indifferent, because there are degrees in all things—the choice of the "subject" no longer has the importance which it had with the classicists and still more with the romanticists. We must not place great dependence on comparisons of one art with another art, and I know of nothing more deceptive than what has been but recently termed general æsthetics! But I cannot help noticing that, in the history of painting, the importance of the "subject" was seen to decrease in proportion as one came into closer contact with reality; and the artistic value of the work was not on that account diminished; only the interest was elsewhere. This has been shown by Eugène Fromentin in his admirable book entitled *The Masters of Yore* (*Les Maîtres d'Autrefois*), the vocabulary of which would need to be only slightly modified to make it an eloquent apology for the naturalistic novel. What the Dutch of the seventeenth century asked of their painters was "to make their portraits", and not at all to arouse their feel-

ings for chimeras, for which, with their sound common sense, they cared nothing, or for images of a past from which each day removed them further. What else does this mean but that, under such conditions, everything is a fit "subject" for the artist who knows how to go about it in the right way, and that it is his manner of treating the subject that gives it its main interest? See, on this point, some canvas of Mieris or Gerard Dow, of Terburg or Metsu, but especially see the Rembrandts of Amsterdam or the Franz Hals of Haarlem. The interest in these pictures consists in their being "true to life"; and, after the lapse of two hundred and fifty years, that is still sufficient for us, as it was for their contemporaries.

It was a revolution of the same kind that Balzac brought about in the novel, and, like the Dutch, by doing artistic work with elements reputed unworthy of art. I know some, even among his admirers, who are not quite sure that he did well, and who could point their finger at more than one episode in *The Human Comedy* which they would have cut out of it. Their motives will be examined when the question of the "morality" of Balzac's works comes up. But, meanwhile, the thing which must be plainly said, and, especially, plainly seen, is that there is neither contradiction

nor incompatibility between certain principles of Balzac and certain liberties of representation which he allowed himself. His rôle, indeed, is only to represent life as he sees it or believes that he sees it, making us judges of the reality of his vision ; and if we are, moreover, to judge it together—Balzac and we, as impartial judges—must not the investigation have been thorough? It can be so, evidently, only if we give to all parts of life not by any means the same importance—nothing would be less in accordance with reality—but the same interest of observation; and this is precisely the meaning of the doctrine of subordination or submission to the object. As naturalists, we have no right to consider the elephant more interesting than the mite, and if it happens that one of the two is to hold in the biological scale a more considerable place than the other, that does not follow because of any reason dependent on our free volition.

Balzac's repeated failures on the stage might perhaps be explained by this "indifference to the subject"; and, indeed, out of the five or six plays of his that we have, if his *Mercadet* can still be performed, it is because it was remodelled by that master-builder whose name was Adolphe d'Ennery. One can conceive of no drama or comedy without a "sub-

ject", that is, without something happening, the beginning, middle, and ending of which something are in equipoise, in conformity with certain rules, or certain laws, if you like; and Molière himself, with his *Misanthrope*, or Le Sage, with his *Turcaret*, could not make it otherwise. The stage must appeal first of all to our curiosity; and, while it may have other means of satisfying this curiosity, it has no other method of exciting it than to interest it "in the thing which is going to take place". And, in this connection, I do not say that Balzac himself did not attempt, in his novels, to appeal more than once to this sort of curiosity, nor that perhaps he would not have done well to appeal to it oftener. I only record the fact that his relative ineffectiveness as a playwright seems, in a manner, connected with one of his essential qualities as a novelist: *The Resources of Quinola* (*Les Ressources de Quinola*) is the ransom paid for *Eugénie Grandet* and *César Birotteau*.

And, lastly, of all the consequences which derive from this "submission of the author to the subject", this is the most important, perhaps: that since no "subject" has in itself any absolute value, the interest we take in it depends largely on its relation to other subjects; and thus *The Human Comedy* ap-

pears to me, at the close of this analysis of the æsthetic value of Balzac's novels, to be the most adequate form of the Balzac novel. His subjects, in his own eyes—I have said this before, but it was only a supposition which required transforming into a certainty—have their whole significance only as each one is a functional part of the whole, and hence the importance that he attaches to his divisions: *Scenes of Parisian Life*, *Scenes of Provincial Life*, *Scenes of Political Life*. Do we, besides, feel quite sure of the "meaning" of these divisions, and do we seriously think, as he did, that each one of them "formulates an epoch in human life"? Are not scenes of provincial or Parisian life necessarily scenes of private or political life? If the *Scenes of Parisian Life* offer us, indeed, "the picture of the tastes, the vices, and all the unbridled passions which are encouraged by the manner of life peculiar to capital cities"—and, even then, can this truly be said of *César Birotteau?*—are we to believe that *Modeste Mignon*, *Béatrix*, and *Old Goriot* represent for us "childhood, youth, and their faults", while *Eugénie Grandet*, *The Vicar of Tours*, and *A Provincial Great Man in Paris* represent for us "the age of passions, calculation, self-interest, and ambition"? These are very subtle distinctions, and it must be ad-

mitted that they do not stand out as clearly as Balzac might have wished. But they have none the less their *raison d'être*, and this *raison d'être* is that by throwing light upon each other, whether it be in the *Scenes of Provincial Life* or in the *Scenes of Parisian Life*, they make the details participate in the life of the ensembles; and not only is that which might have been believed to be insignificant no longer so, but nothing is insignificant; and, as in zoology, everything finds its place, its order, and its classification.

For, because of all these characteristics, Balzac's novels are, I repeat, naturalistic novels; and if possibly it was thought strange, a moment ago, that I should lay such stress on this point, perhaps also the reasons for this insistence are beginning to be seen. It is because, in truth, it is a question of nothing less than the principal evolution of French literature in the nineteenth century, and of such a thorough and radical transformation of the novel that the very manner of reading novels has been changed since Balzac's appeared.

It is especially with Balzac that we are concerned here, but one way of praising him, which, no doubt, is worth more than all dithyrambs, is to try to define the characteristic nature of his action. Now, as regards this,

the fact cannot be ignored that, if between 1840 and 1850 "naturalism" was seen to break away from "romanticism" and to end by opposing it and prevailing over it, it is the Balzac novel which was the principal agent of this transformation. Mention has been made more than once of the influence on Balzac himself of novelists who were his contemporaries, and there appears to be no doubt of this influence. In writing *The Lily of the Valley* he wanted to rewrite Sainte-Beuve's novel, and the reasons for this fancy may be discovered in his *Correspondence*, by noting the traces of the impression made on him by *Soul's Delight*. His judgment of this work is well worth quotation: "There has appeared a book, good enough for certain souls, often badly written, weak, loose, diffuse, rejected by everybody, but which I courageously read, and in which there are some fine things. It is *Soul's Delight*, by Sainte-Beuve. He who has not had his Madame de Couaën is unworthy of living. In this dangerous friendship with a married woman, by whose side the irresolute soul cringes, rises, stoops, never deciding to use audacity, wishing for the commission of the sin and yet not committing it, there is all the joy of early youth." And a little further on he points out, together with one

of the defects of the book, the motive which he, Balzac, has for rewriting it. "It is a puritanical book. Madame de Couaën is not feminine enough, and there is no danger!"* Balzac purposed to put a little more sensuality into Sainte-Beuve's novel.

Attempts have also been made to show him to us as if he were subjected to the influence of Eugène Sue; but on the contrary—and just after 1840—if the mystifying author of *Plik and Plok* (*Plik et Plok*), *The Lookout Man of Coatven* (*La Vigie de Coatven*), and *Attar-Gull* became the writer of *The Mysteries of Paris* and *The Wandering Jew*, it is rather Eugène Sue who felt Balzac's influence. Let us observe chronology! After which, if one be tempted to discover some reminiscences of *The Mysteries of Paris* in *The Last Incarnation of Vautrin*, let us remember in time that the complete character of Vautrin already existed in *Old Goriot*. Balzac envied Eugène Sue only his success in making money.

Lastly, as regards George Sand, Balzac's judgment of *Jacques* will suffice, I think, to show whether he could, even unconsciously, ever have dreamt of imitating her: "*Jacques*, Madame Dudevant's last novel, is advice

* *Letters to an Alien*, 1833, No. LXIX.

given to husbands who trouble their wives, to kill themselves, so as to give them back their liberty. . . . This book is false from beginning to end. A *naïve* young girl [the italics are Balzac's] leaves, after six months of marriage, a man of *superior* merit for a fop, a dandy, without any physiological or moral reason. *All these authors are running about in vacancy* [this time the italics are mine], *they are riding on horseback over vacuum; there is nothing true in what they write.* I much prefer ogres, *Hop o' my Thumb* (*Le petit Poucet*) and *The Sleeping Beauty* (*La Belle au Bois dormant*)." * There is not much danger, apparently, of being subjected to the influence of a writer about whom one expresses oneself with such freedom.

Of course, this does not mean that Balzac, unassisted, and solely by the contagion of his own success, brought about the transformation which I am attempting to summarise. There were other causes, or, as we should say to-day, other factors, in the evolution of romanticism towards naturalism. For instance, it was noticed, about 1840, that a personal literature was necessarily, or very soon became, monotonous or extravagant. It became monotonous because, to speak the truth and in spite

* *Letters to an Alien*, 1834, No. LXXI.

of our vanity, each one of us, were he a Hugo, a Lamartine, or a Musset, has after all only a few things to say about himself, and the manner of saying them certainly establishes a difference between one man and another—between the poet who wrote *The Lake* and him who wrote *Olympio's Sadness;* but they are still the same things, and we recognise their likeness. Does a personal literature wish to escape this reproach? It must, then, seek its originality in the rare or the exceptional, and in that case the artist, by distorting himself, must devise for himself a manner of denaturing, in order to make it his own, everything that he represents; and *The Burgraves* and *Ruy Blas* have remained famous examples of this. Balzac wrote an abusive criticism of *Ruy Blas*, in his *Letters to an Alien*, of such a nature that, if Victor Hugo had known of it, I fear his opinion of Balzac would perhaps not have been the one he expressed, in 1850, at the funeral of the great novelist.

On the other hand, there was such downright contradiction between the æsthetics of romanticism and the general spirit of the age that it was really impossible that this disagreement should not break out in respect to more than one question at the same time. The pressure of individualism which had char-

acterised the years of the Revolution and the Empire was being followed by a beginning of reaction which made itself felt everywhere, which was not yet, properly speaking, either what was soon to be called "positivism" or "socialism", but which, in a manner, foreshadowed them both. One of the representatives of this reaction is the great philosopher Auguste Comte, so superior to the university men who affected to disdain him. His *Treatise on Positive Philosophy* (*Cours de Philosophie positive*), the publication of which was completed in 1842, offers remarkable analogies with *The Human Comedy*, itself also dated 1842. Not the least symptomatic analogy, of course, is the importance, novel at that time, which was attached by Balzac and Comte to the sciences of life, which they both considered the real sciences. And, in fact, all other sciences are only the sciences of abstraction or pure reason, whereas these are the sciences of reality. It was about 1840 that these ideas began to spread; and it will readily be understood that, their object being to turn man away from the useless, empty, and conceited contemplation of himself, and to incite him to study in himself not himself personally, but that in himself which resembles what is likewise to be found in other men, the effects of

these ideas made themselves felt at the same time wherever individualism had too long prevailed; and thus the transformation of literature appears to me to be a consequence of the general transformation that took place in the minds of men.

I might add that there are in literature forms, such as the drama, which cannot long endure being used by the poet only as a means of explaining, commenting on, or admiring himself; and let us frankly recognise, in this connection, that *Hernani*, *The King Enjoys Himself* (*Le Roi s'amuse*), and *The Burgraves* do not belong to the stage any more than does Vigny's *Chatterton*, or the plays of Musset, *No Trifling with Love* (*On ne badine pas avec l'Amour*), or *There is no Answering for What One May Do* (*Il ne faut jurer de rien*). By this I do not mean to imply that their literary interest or artistic value is on that account any the less; Charles Lamb, who reproached Shakespeare only for not being absolutely "unactable", would have thought that it was all the greater. For, said he, this prince of poets, in order to adapt himself to the requirements of the stage, had to stoop to humanise his nature, and, by so doing, to "vulgarise" it. As for me, I do not share that opinion. But, at all events, it is certain that if any form

of literature imperatively requires that the author "alienate himself", so to speak, from himself, and never show himself to us except "objectively", it is the drama. No playwright ever was the "exhibitor" of himself; or rather, if we reverse the sentencc, the formula will be more correct: no "exhibitor" of himself ever was a Shakespeare or a Molière. The success of Alexandre Dumas, and of Eugène Scribe—whom that rollicking but jealous negro affected to despise so much, although they were of the samc family of dramatic producers—exposed on the stage the falsity of the romantic ideal; and it has been recognised, from that time on, that if, for example, *The Glass of Water* (*Le Verre d'Eau*) and *Bondage* (*Une Chaîne*) are dramas, *Lélia* and *The Confession of a Child of the Century* cannot possibly be novels.

But I am inclined to believe that the influence of the Balzac novel was the most active, in a literary sense, of all these causes of transformation, by reason of the simplicity of the principle of "subordination to the subject", and also because of its fecundity. If classicism had been the negation, or, at least, the perpetual restriction of the following paradox—that no aspect of reality is unworthy, in itself, of being represented by art, and that

the very object of art consists only in faithfully reproducing this reality—and if romanticism was its contradiction, the Balzac novel was its demonstration. Beginning with *The Vicar of Tours* (1832) and *Eugénie Grandet* (1833), the demonstration was carried on, from year to year, with *The Quest of the Absolute* (1834), *Old Goriot* (1834), *The Marriage Contract* (1835), *The Old Maid* (1836), *César Birotteau* (1837), *The Village Curé* (1839), and *A Dark Affair* (1841), so many narratives of which it might be said—with a little exaggeration, to make plainer one's meaning, and with the exception of the last mentioned—that the plot is almost nil, and that they are valuable, as I have already said, not at all in spite of, but because of this very absence of plot. This was nothing less than a displacement of the ideal of art—which until then had been the ideal of the romanticists. Nothing of greater moment had occurred since the time when Molière and Racine had brought about, in the midst of classicism, the revolution which transformed it, about 1660, into a "naturalism" tempered only by conventionalities. And —rather a remarkable coincidence!—it was in both cases the same means which had acted in a sovereign manner; I mean the determining of the definite formula of a form by the

masters of that form: Molière's comedy in the seventeenth century, and, in the nineteenth, the Balzac novel.

I am aware of, I even have personal reasons for realising, the opposition offered by criticism —or critics—and historians of literature to the doctrine of the evolution of forms. And I admit, moreover, that in order to warrant this opposition, if they generally have but poor reasons to adduce, they would at any rate take care to hunt for specious arguments. They may find them some day! But arguments more specious still were opposed to "Darwinism", and whatever profound modifications from the doctrines of Darwin the progress of biological science may have undergone in the last forty-five years, neither this progress nor these arguments prevented the expressions—which have become classic—of "natural selection" and "the struggle for existence" from continuing to express "facts". I will here say nothing more of the evolution of forms in the history of literature and art. That forms do evolve, or transform themselves, is a fact; that this transformation is realised only under definite circumstances or conditions is another fact; and, lastly, it is a fact that, "as there is a point of maturity or perfection in nature", likewise there is a point of perfection in the evolution of forms.

The Balzac novel more than once reached this point of perfection. It added to the novel, as it was conceived before him, precisely that which it lacked in order to be the novel, and not, for example, the *conte*, or the short story or the comedy. What had kept the novel from attaining perfection in this form of composition was that, its object being—and necessarily, or on account of its nature, not from choice——to represent common life, false æsthetics imposed on it this strange condition of representing common life while forbidding it the right to represent common life's constituent elements. Imagine the Dutch being prevented from painting kitchen utensils, a saucepan and a kettle, a stone crock or a tobacco-jar, their old women's petticoats or the knee-breeches of their grotesque male figures; and, let me ask, what would remain of Dutch painting? Such was about the condition imposed on the novel. And for a long time, although this was a contradiction, novelists had submitted to it because, on the one hand, the most uncompromising classicists would not have dared to deny that "imitation of nature and life" was at least the foundation, if not the end, of art; and they could not, therefore, deny the legitimacy of the novel; but, on the other hand, it was required that the novel should apply itself to

represent in nature and society only what was the least particular, singular, or characteristic in them. Balzac was the first to overcome this exacting requirement, and by so doing he gave the novel a chance of becoming "real".

What happened, before his time, when a novelist ventured to introduce into his story elements which, by their definition, as for example, the description of pieces of furniture or of a costume, or, again, the description of a disease, were not reputed literary? He "disqualified" himself, in the eyes of public opinion as well as of criticism; and, in the history of the efforts of the novel towards the perfection of its form, everything had then to be done over again. Matters, as we have seen, had changed only a little with Walter Scott, in whose case it had been fully recognised that these means, hardly considered literary, were the only ones there were to "place" or "localise" a narrative in history. I have attempted to tell, in the present chapter, how Balzac accomplished the rest. Have I made it clear that he did this almost without being aware of it, through an inspiration of genius, and not at all, as did Hugo in his preface to *Cromwell*, by virtue of a theory of art specially evolved by coteries of men of letters? And no doubt, also, this is why next to nothing survives of the preface to

Cromwell, or of his almost grotesque æsthetics, while we shall see, further on, what were the consequences of Balzac's work.

Does this mean, then, that until Balzac appeared a mistake had been made, not only in the means of bringing the novel to the perfection of its form, but in the very object of the novel? It might be, it even would be nothing extraordinary: were not poets and critics, in France, mistaken, for more than two centuries, as regards the elements of lyric poetry? But that is a different matter, and the truth is that for a long time the "representation of life" was not considered to be an object worthy of art. What was discussed during the whole classic period was, not the way to bring the novel to its perfection, but, in reality, the novel itself as a literary form. And, accordingly, that is why, during the entire classic age, in Italy no more than in England, or in Spain than in France, not a single great writer—with the exception of Cervantes alone, and is *Don Quixote* a novel?—practised novel-writing. There may have been novelists who were remarkable writers: Daniel Defoe, for instance, in England, or, in France, Alain-René Le Sage; but it is neither to *Gil Blas* that Le Sage nor to *Robinson Crusoe* that Defoe devoted his principal efforts. Conversely, if a

writer of any eminence, during the whole classic age, wrote any novels, he looked upon them as mere side-issues; and if any one had told Voltaire that his *Candide* or his *Zadig* would outlive his *Zaïre* or even his *Charles XII.*, he would have thought him singularly impertinent. And even so, *Candide* and *Zadig* are not "representations of life"! It was therefore the novel, as such, that the classic age had despised, considering it to be an inferior form, fit only for those who were unable to write odes or tragedies, or even versified epistles or vaudevilles. But this is also why, merely by raising it from this condition of inferiority, Balzac accomplished a work of such importance. "What a vain thing is that painting which excites our admiration by the imitation of things we do not admire!" This had been the principle of the classic age. Balzac irretrievably overthrew it, by showing and justifying the reason for this admiration.

And indeed, if, as in painting, the object we "imitate" is only a flower, or a tree, or even an animal, there is room only for the literalness of imitation and the virtuosity of the artist. I will say so, at any rate, though I do not feel absolutely sure of it, and I am quite ready to believe that there is something more in a landscape painting by Ruysdael.

But what is very certain is that when one "imitates" a civilisation or a whole society, then the truth of the imitation goes beyond itself; and the "representation of life" necessarily becomes a "study of manners", as Balzac called it, or a "social study", as we say to-day. One cannot write *Old Goriot* or *Cousin Bette* without including, even though involuntarily, an analysis of the conditions of the French family in the nineteenth century; and one cannot portray *The Country Doctor* or *The Village Curé* without bringing to light the innermost structure of that society. In this sense, there really is in *The Human Comedy* what in our day is called a sociology. This is what I must now consider in Balzac's novels, and, after having attempted to state their historical significance and their æsthetic value, I must now attempt to gauge their social bearing.

CHAPTER VI

THE SOCIAL BEARING OF BALZAC'S NOVELS

One does not "observe" merely for the satisfaction of observing—although the pleasure it procures may be very great—and, even in the order of sciences, or especially in the order of sciences, no observation is an end unto itself. This is not always realised by those who give themselves the name of observers, or who are honoured as such—men who usually mistake statistics for science, and a system of cards for erudition, and of whom it might be said that they store away facts as philatelists collect postage-stamps. They never have enough! And if, some fine day, one derives any benefit from their collections, he will not condemn them; but, in the meanwhile, they merely care for and pride themselves on having made them.

Balzac's observation is something more and something very different. "I was equipped with great power of observation," he wrote to Madame Hanska, at the very outset of their intimacy, in the beginning of 1833, "because I was thrown into all sorts of professions, in-

voluntarily. Then, when I moved in the higher circles of society, I suffered in every part which suffering can reach, and it is only misappreciated souls and the poor who know how to observe, because everything wounds them, and observation is the result of suffering. Memory keeps a record only of what is painful. In this respect great pain recalls great joy, for pleasure — great pleasure — borders on pain. *Thus it is that society in all its phases, from top to bottom, laws, religions, histories, the present time, everything has been analysed and observed by me!*" There is some exaggeration, even charlatanism, in this. "Laws, religions, histories"—that is a good deal; and possibly Balzac divined them; but "analysed"! or seriously, conscientiously studied them!—that is a different matter, and the "Alien's" correspondent must have been having a little fun at her expense. If laws, religions, and histories are perhaps not so mysterious as some of those who study them would have us think that they are—those who would fain monopolise them, if they could—yet they are not to be mastered incidentally in less time than it takes to write a *Clotilde de Lusignan;* and, as a matter of fact, it is but too evident, when he presumes to meddle with certain subjects, how shallow Balzac's erudition is. This is what Sainte-Beuve was to prove

to him;* and it is what Balzac never forgave him.

But the interesting point here is the idea of observation which Balzac forms for himself. Let us try clearly to apprehend his meaning. What does he mean when he boasts of having observed everything? He took no "notes", nor did he keep any "records". When would he have found time? In the sense in which the word is usually understood, Balzac had no leisure to observe; and, moreover, he would not have had the patience. But he observed all he needed to know in order to enable him to "realise" the world which he carried in his head, and to infuse into it that principle or breath of life without which records and notes, whatever they may contain, are nothing else, to give them their real name, but useless scribbled paper. Having his own vision, a complete if not exact one—or an indistinct but total one —of "a society in all its phases", he asked of observation only the means of giving embodiment to his vision. And as for the resemblance of this vision to reality, it was not at all by confronting reality and vision, or checking one by the other, that he secured it, but by tracing them back to their generating causes,

* Compare *Port-Royal*, I, 549–559.

and by observing in the same way as he invented, so to speak, in conformity with nature. Balzac's observation is naturalistic in fact and social in intention; and if natural man is precisely social man, and not he whom one begins by isolating or abstracting from society in order the better to observe him, perhaps I ought to say that it is social on condition of being naturalistic.

When I speak of the social bearing of the Balzac novel, I therefore take no account of his political or religious opinions, which were neither very deep nor very original; and which, above all, have but distant connection with the quality of his work and the nature of his genius. By this I mean that if Balzac, instead of declaring himself a "Catholic" and a "royalist", had professed opinions exactly the opposite, I do not exactly see what change there would be in his conception of *Old Goriot*, or in the delineation of his *Cousin Pons*. I can see perfectly what *Delphine* would not be if Madame de Staël had been a Catholic from her birth; but it would certainly take a very subtle critic or historian to discover in *Atala* Chateaubriand's royalism. The same must be said of Balzac. If he happened to write a novel, like *The Country Doctor*, for the very purpose of expressing in it his religious and political ideals

in the year 1833, of course I recognise him therein; and, in an analysis of *The Country Doctor*, I should then have to discuss the opinions which Balzac put into the mouth of Doctor Benassis. But in a general way Balzac's art, his conceptions of art and life, and the representation of them which he has given us in his *Human Comedy*, have nothing either necessarily or even very closely connected with his political or religious opinions.

I well know that he tried, with application and pertinacity, to persuade himself of the contrary, in the prefaces which he dictated to Félix Davin and in the introduction to *The Human Comedy*—and I think he succeeded. He did not convince his contemporaries, who, while admiring him, seemed to regard as of rather small moment his politics or his "sociology". Balzac's political or religious opinions —whatever else we may think of them, and whether we share them or not—do not incorporate with his work. They are distinct and detached from it. And while their interest may not be the less on that account, it is of the same nature as that which George Sand's or Victor Hugo's opinions inspire in us.

I must be forgiven for emphasising this point. But it would be a serious distortion of Balzac's real physiognomy to picture him to

oneself wearing, if I may venture to say so, the cap of a doctor of social science. Competence and authority can no more be improvised in matters of politics or religion than in matters of science; and no more than the novelists or the playwrights who were his contemporaries did Balzac, before meddling with things pertaining to politics or religion, take the trouble or give himself the leisure to study them. For this reason, when he asserts, for instance, that "Christianity, and especially Catholicism, being a complete system of repression of man's depraved tendencies, is the greatest element of the social order", we fully apprehend his meaning—and he may be right, as he may be wrong—but to take his assertion seriously would be going too far. Nor should we fail to recognise that an apology for Christianity will always be open to suspicion, coming from the pen of the author of *Splendours and Miseries of Courtesans*, to say nothing of *The Petty Worries of Conjugal Life* (*Petites Misères de la Vie conjugale*) or *The Physiology of Marriage*, for these books are absolutely indecent. But even if Balzac were not the author of some of his novels, it would still be sufficient for us to know the history of his life in order to feel well assured that, as in the time intervening between the

negotiation of two publishers' contracts or the purchase of two pieces of buhl furniture he no doubt never seriously studied Catholicism or Christianity, no more importance should be attached to what he may have said of them than to a flight of fancy or humour; and his authority is no authority.

Let us therefore dismiss the dissertations with which he filled his *Village Curé* or his *Country Doctor*. Let us set aside the observations he made, cursorily, on the "system of co-operation" or on the "power of association". What is meant, when one speaks of the social bearing of Balzac's novels, is, as I have just remarked, that the society he represented in his work is a "complete" or almost complete "society", provided with all a society's organs, not one of which is considered independently, and by itself or for its own sake, but solely in its relation to the other organs and to the ensemble. What is also meant is that in a form like the novel before him, denatured, perverted, unbalanced, owing to the prominence given to the passions of love, Balzac, by introducing the representation of other passions, turned the form into a representative image of society as a whole, whose chief preoccupation has at no time, whatever else may be said of it, been to "make love". It never

has been a chief preoccupation except in literature, and especially since the romanticists. And what is further meant—if one recalls here what I said of the historical significance of Balzac's novels—is that in the description or representation of that society he had the art of making us anticipate the coming modifications in society, and thus of showing us in their working, in the mechanism of their daily play, the springs whose principles he had begun by laying bare.

A "complete society", with all its organs, or, as he says himself, "with its genealogy and families . . . its nobles and bourgeois, its artisans and peasants, its politicians and dandies"—and, one might add, its magistrates and diplomats, its men of letters and business men, its lawyers, physicians, merchants, and soldiers—this indeed had not been seen in the novel before Balzac; and since Balzac—it is well to note it here—it has not been seen again. Balzac's heroes live, so to speak, only inasmuch as each one is in functional relation with the others, a life which may be called preeminently "social", and one whose accidents depend, as it were, not on his heroes themselves, but on circumstances, and consequently on the influences which shape their lives.

"There is but one animal," he wrote in the introduction to *The Human Comedy*. "The

Creator made use of but one single and identical pattern for all organised beings. The animal is a principle which takes its external form, or, to speak more accurately, the differences in its form, from the environments in which it is intended that it should develop. Zoological species are the result of these differences." And further on: "Therefore there have existed, and will exist, at all times social species as there are zoological species." No doubt the analogy is more apparent than real. Whatever Balzac may say, it is not true that "the differences existing between a soldier, a workman, an administrator" are "as considerable" as those which distinguish from each other the wolf, the lion, the ass, the crow, the shark, and . . . the seal". Do "zoological species" vary? That is a point on which our savants, in spite of Lamarck and Darwin, are not yet, half a century after Balzac, agreed. But it seems, however, easier to turn a workman into a soldier, and even into a marshal of France—instances are to be found in history and in the Balzac novel—than to make a lion of an ass or a wolf of a seal; and "social species" are a good deal more plastic than natural species.

This is none the less the formula for Balzac's characters. They really take their "form", or

"differences in" their "form", from the environments in which "it is intended that" they shall "develop"; and thus it is that a veteran, like Philippe Bridau, a manufacturer of vermicelli, like old Goriot, a soldier risen from the ranks, like Major Genestas, women like the Duchess of Langeais, Madame de Nucingen, and Madame Camusot de Marville, become in his *Comedy* the expression of a whole social condition, with, if I may so speak, its "butts and bounds", its circumstances of formation, its intricacy of effects and causes, its value both individual and typical. "Not only men," Balzac also said, "but even the principal events of life are formulated by types. There are situations, typical phases, that are reproduced in all existences, and it is exactness in these matters which I have most sought." Where it stands, in the introduction to *The Human Comedy*, this sentence is somewhat obscure. One does not well see how "the principal events of life are formulated by types". But in order to understand it we have only to put it by the side of this other sentence, "Mayenne and Charleville have their Grandet, just as Saumur has"; and is it not true that at once all becomes clear? Balzac's novels are social novels in the sense that individuals do not really exist in them outside and independently

of the class whose representatives they are, nor, consequently, apart from the "society" whose creatures they are.

And they are furthermore "social" because of the persistency with which, in most of them, without in any way attempting to maintain a thesis, Balzac tried to discover and to lay bare, as I have said, the essential springs of this society.

Thus it is that he delighted in studying, in a series of "successful men" which extends from his Rastignac to his Vautrin, that letting loose of immoderate energy called forth by the example of Napoleon and his prodigious success, whose model or incarnation critics persist, I know not why, in trying to see in Stendhal's Julien Sorel.* Why, in comparison with the heroes of action in the Balzac novel, this Julien Sorel is only a puppet, and I should not like to decide which is more to be marvelled at, the incoherence of this character or the conceit of its author. There is more verity in a single gesture of Balzac's Rastignac than in the whole person of Julien Sorel; and if models of this energy which the emulation of Napoleon aroused in the imagination of the youth of that day are wanted, it is in *The*

* *The Red and the Black* (*Le Rouge et le Noir*), 1830.

Human Comedy that they will be found. We know that one of their characteristics is the absence of any sort of scruple, and this is what has sometimes been called Balzac's immorality. I shall return to this point in a moment; but here, where it is a question only of the lifelike exactness of the imitation of the human, I shall confine myself to inquiring, by what scruples, what kind of scruples, was a Napoleon, a Talleyrand, or a Fouché stopped in his enterprises?

What Balzac brings out no less clearly is the disorganisation of the family, through the pressure of individualism, in a new society, sprung from the Revolution. Here again I do not discuss, and I refrain from taking up the main point of the question. As to whether it is the family or the individual that ought to be considered as the primitive "cell" of the social organism, Balzac's novels adduce no argument one way or the other. Nor need I expatiate further on considerations regarding the laws of primogeniture or the laws of inheritance, since Balzac, in his narratives, treated both subjects only by way of digression. But all that need be said is that if the breaking up of old family customs is, doubtless, partly the work of time, but also in part the work of the French Revolution, no one realised it better

than Balzac; and his *Human Comedy* is, as it were, impregnated with this conviction. He hated the new individualism, and in a certain sense his work is nothing but a kind of arraignment of, or rather crusade against, this great foe to self-denial as well as to any spirit of solidarity. In this particular I consider it eminently social. It keeps our attention constantly fixed upon this social problem above all others—the organisation of the family in its relation to society. *Eugénie Grandet*, *Old Goriot*, *A Bachelor's Establishment*, *Modeste Mignon*, *The Muse of the Department*, *An Inventor's Sufferings*, *Cousin Pons*, and *Cousin Bette* are essentially "family dramas". And if any lesson is to be drawn from them it is this, that through the disorganisation of the family modern societies are proceeding towards a state of things in which, the tyranny of law exercising itself universally, without obstacle and without intermediate agency, there is no middle course between anarchistic individualism on the one hand and the crushing of the individual by anonymous and impersonal collectivism on the other.

"The family will always be the foundation of society. Unavoidably temporary, incessantly divided, recomposed only to be again disunited, without ties between the future and

the past, the family of former days no longer exists in France. Those who proceeded to tear down the old edifice were logical in dividing equally the family possessions, in lessening the father's authority, in making any child the head of a new family, in doing away with great responsibilities; but is the reconstructed social state as strong with its untried laws, which have not yet been put to a long test, as was monarchy with its former abuses? When society lost the solidarity of families, it lost that fundamental force which Montesquieu had discovered and named *honour*. It isolated everything the better to dominate; it divided everything in order to weaken. It rules over unities, over figures agglomerated like grains of wheat in a heap. Can the common interest take the place of the family? Time will solve this great question." *

In the meantime, and before this extreme point has been reached, what Balzac has also admirably seen and shown in his work is the development of a form of egoism which, in a measure, is opposed to that tyranny of collectivism. Balzac's egoists are of a particular kind, whose characteristic trait consists in this, that their conscience—allowing that they

* *The Village Curé.*

have a conscience—never hesitates in regard to their legitimate right to live and to be successful. And, in fact, their egoism—that of Eugène de Rastignac or of Célestin Crevel, for instance—forms part, so to speak, of a social system in the preservation and maintenance of which it concurs. If we are to believe some economists, "competition" is "the soul of trade", and we know how little they care if it is practised at the cost of ruin and disaster. What matters to society the bankruptcy of a César Birotteau, if more "Macassar oil" is still manufactured, and if, from day to day, the perfumery industry sells it to us cheaper? In this way Balzac's egoists consider that their success is not only their own, but that of a whole set of customers, even of a whole class who follow in their train. This is what gives them an unshaken self-confidence, which is equalled only by their vast desires. By applying themselves to succeed, and to the extent of their success, they set the example of success. The history of these men becomes what Balzac calls a "formula of life". They are like those American multi-millionaires who, never having had any engrossing thought except the making of money, find that by making it, and making it more quickly, they have transformed an entire industry,

and, by the transformation of this industry, the manner of living of thousands of their fellow men. In this respect, too, the Balzac novel has really a social bearing.

Accordingly, it is easy to understand why Balzac, whose attention was engrossed with discovering, seizing, and making fast these traits, gives in his work only an entirely secondary place to the portrayal of the passions of love, while, on the contrary, he gives considerable space to the money question. I need not dwell on this point further. But I may add a few words to what I have already said on this subject; and surely it is no waste of time to examine thoroughly the question of how the social bearing of Balzac's novels is partly the result of this subordination of the passions of love.

I have attempted to explain elsewhere, and more than once, the reasons for the universal prestige exercised, on the stage or in the novel, by the representation of the passions of love. The passions of love are the most "universal" of all the passions, and each one of us may flatter himself that he has within him the ability to experience them, or at least to understand them. But when that is said, love, great love, passionate love, such love as is unfolded in Shakespeare's dramas or in the

tragedies of Racine—that sort of love is rather rare; and perhaps we ought to congratulate ourselves that such is the case! The race to which the Chevalier Des Grieux belongs, or Valentine, or Indiana, is not of the kind whose multiplication ought to be encouraged. There will always be plenty of such people! But what is especially true is that by seeming to make love the sole and engrossing concern of its heroes the novel, before Balzac, gave a false representation of life. Humanity, as a rule, is taken up with a good many other things besides love; other interests require the attention of men, and other necessities make their weight felt. Love is not, and has never been, and cannot be the principal occupation of anybody except a few idle people, whose time is neither money, nor work, nor action, nor anything whatsoever that can be transformed into social utility. Lovers will therefore have their place in the representation of the drama of life; but they will have only their place; and as often as the truth of the narrative may require it, preoccupations foreign to this love will divert them from it.

The representation is complete, both in the sense that all the elements which form the society contemporaneous with Balzac appear in their place, and therefore also in the sense

that not one of the springs which set this society in motion has been omitted. The Balzac novel is "social" by the nature of the preoccupations, I will not say which predominate in it, but which fill it, and which sometimes even come to light as if without the author's knowledge; and it is "social" by the nature of the means which he uses to exhibit these preoccupations. It will be noticed that this is precisely what is lacking in George Sand's novels, all or nearly all of which, between 1830 and 1848, have "social" pretensions—"We are preparing a revolution in future manners," she said to Balzac himself, in 1838—but whose means are purely "literary" or "oratorical", and of whose characters it might be said that their manner of thinking is dependent on their manner of loving! George Sand's novels, I mean her best ones, are novels with social pretensions but with little social bearing, and the reading of them is to-day almost impossible, in spite of the beauty of their style; Balzac's novels have all the more bearing because they have less pretensions—and the best of them in this respect is not *The Country Doctor*.

I grant, moreover, that in so far as it is not a matter of indifference that a doctrine can have the name or authority of a great

mind to support it, the social bearing of Balzac's novels may be extended a little beyond these conclusions. Therefore, if it be once fully understood that with all his genius —which, in other respects, raises him so far above a M. de Bonald or a Joseph de Maistre— Balzac is, however, neither of those two great minds, there is reason, not for discussing, as I have already said, but for noticing or recording some of his opinions. They are not wanting in some accuracy, nor even—notwithstanding his manner of forming them, that is to say, without any great study or reflection— in some depth.

Thus it is interesting to see Balzac, the contemporary of George Sand and Victor Hugo—just as incapable as they, I do not say of personally submitting to any yoke, but of subjecting himself to any discipline—on all occasions denouncing individualism as almost the only source of the evils which perplex the society of his time. Elsewhere he attributes these evils to "the lack of religion" and "the omnipotence of money". But the great enemy is individualism; and individualists like his Rastignac, his Vautrin, or his Bridau are certainly dangerous characters. Shall I charge him, in this connection, with contradiction, and, with easily assumed and commonplace

irony, feign astonishment because his principles do not accord with his "temperament"? In no wise!—I especially, who believe that principles were given to us to check and regulate temperaments. But—and this will be much more just and in accordance with reality—I see in the war which Balzac never ceased waging on individualism—from *The Country Doctor* to *Cousin Bette*—a conclusion of his inquiry into the society of his time, and a conclusion whose verisimilitude is strengthened, so to speak, by all which it contains that is contrary to the temperament of the novelist. Must not such a conclusion, to have forced itself upon Balzac, have appeared to him so evident or so clear as to be dazzling?—and this is no doubt worth noticing.

Here is a page on universal suffrage which I take from his *Country Doctor;* it is Doctor Benassis who is speaking:

"Universal suffrage, which is claimed to-day by people belonging to the so-called Constitutional Opposition, was an excellent principle in the Church, because, as you have just pointed out, my dear pastor, the individuals were all trained men, disciplined by the sense of religion, imbued with the same system, knowing well what they wanted and whither they were tending. But the triumph of the ideas

with whose help modern Liberalism imprudently wages war on the prosperous government of the Bourbons would be the ruin of France, and of the Liberals themselves. The leaders of the Left well know it. As far as they are concerned, this struggle is simply a question of possession. If, God forbid, the bourgeoisie should overthrow, under the banner of the Opposition, the social superiorities which cause its vanity to kick against the pricks, that triumph would immediately be followed by a steady conflict between the bourgeoisie and the people, who, later, would see in the bourgeoisie a kind of aristocracy, a paltry one, to be sure, but one whose fortunes and privileges would be all the more odious to them because they would feel them to be nearer home. In this conflict society—I do not say the nation—would meet a new death, because the triumph of the suffering masses, always a temporary one, implies the greatest disorders. This conflict would be relentless, without truce, for it would be founded upon the instinctive or acquired differences among the electors, the least enlightened but more numerous portion of whom would prevail over the more prominent members of society in a system where votes are counted and not weighed. . . .

"Such are the reasons which lead me to think that the principle of election is one of the most pernicious that exist in modern governments. I believe, most assuredly, that I have sufficiently proved my attachment to the poor and suffering class—I cannot be accused of wishing for their misfortune; but, while admiring them as they plod, with sublime patience and resignation, their weary road, I declare them incapable of taking part in the government. Proletarians seem to me to be the minors of a nation, and ought always to remain under guardianship. Thus, in my opinion, the word *election* will come near doing as much harm as the words *conscience* and *liberty* have caused—words ill-understood and ill-defined, thrown to the people as symbols of revolt and orders for destruction."

Nor should I like to treat with too much neglect some of the views that Balzac has expressed on Catholicism, which make him, like Lamennais, one of the precursors of what has since been called "social Catholicism". He even kept clear of the rock upon which was wrecked the author of *Words of a Believer* (*Paroles d'un Croyant*); and while the latter, in his love for democracy, ended by making of the two words "Catholicism" and "democracy" two terms always interchangeable—and, in all that they

stand for, two things constantly equivalent—Balzac saw very well that one might be an excellent Christian without being a "democrat", and especially a thorough democrat without in any wise being a Christian. "This priest," he said of Abbé Dutheil, one of those whom he portrayed in his *Village Curé*, "belonged to that very small portion of the French clergy who lean towards some concessions, *who would like to see the Church make the interests of the people her own*, that she might recover, by carrying out the true evangelical doctrines, her former influence over the masses, *whom she could then bring back to monarchy*." He treats the same subject again, in another part of the same narrative, through the mouth of Abbé Bonnet, who is the "village curé": "Initiated perhaps by my sufferings into the secrets of charity, as defined by the great Saint Paul in his adorable *Epistle*, I wanted to heal the sores of the poor in some out-of-the-way corner, then, if God deigned to bless my efforts, to prove, by my example, that the Catholic religion, taken in its human works, is the only true, the only good, noble, and civilising power." It will be seen that this is a complete programme; and neither Ketteler, Manning, nor Gibbons borrowed it from Balzac; but while it is nevertheless theirs, Balzac formulated it before they did.

Still less shall I fail to recognise that this same programme, although it does not show a thorough knowledge of the truths of religion —which Balzac does not seem to have possessed—yet implies a singular knowledge of the conditions which, about 1840, were the necessary elements of the social renovation of Catholicism. And if these conditions were discerned by no one more clearly than by the author of *The Human Comedy*, what else does it mean but that the social philosophy of his novels really penetrated farther and deeper into the analysis of the society of his day than was thought, on the one hand; and, on the other, that one cannot disregard, just because it comes from a novelist, an opinion which has ever since—yes, even as it was being discussed—appeared to be approaching nearer and nearer the truth? May I be allowed to remark, in this connection, that on this point, as on several others, as I pointed out above, Balzac's opinions as given in his *Village Curé*, the final edition of which was published in 1845, singularly coincide with those of Auguste Comte, which he publicly taught in 1842, as given in his *Treatise on Positive Philosophy*. There also, as is known—in the *Treatise on Positive Philosophy*—is to be found a beautiful apology for the "social virtue of

Christianity", and, I will add, a trace of the influence of Joseph de Maistre on Auguste Comte, as profound as the influence of Bonald on Balzac. These influences will have to be taken into account when the attempt is made to outline the history of ideas in the nineteenth century; and, in order to write this history, it will be necessary to separate the currents and counter-currents which in turn were blended, divided, opposed, retarded, and united, and the direction, strength, and number of which no one has yet determined, not even the Danish critic, M. Georg Brandes, whose great work does not come up to what its title had led one to expect.

At all events, that which cannot be denied is the agreement between a Balzac and a Comte on more than one point of their philosophy. What is interesting is to note that this accord was bred, so to speak, from the application of similar methods. The author of *The Human Comedy* was also a "positivist"; and both of them, Comte and Balzac, Balzac and Comte, understood "observation" in nearly the same way. Implacable enemies as they both were of all that goes by the name of "individualism" or "subjectivism", it was the "objective value" of their subjects which they both strove to make incontestable, and

to uphold against the always arbitrary, inasmuch as they are personal, interpretations of eclecticism and the romanticists. Not only is it not true, in fact, that each thing appears to each one of us under a different aspect, determined by one's "idiosyncrasy"—and this is nothing but a prodigious and impertinent delusion of pride—but the same reality forces itself upon all intellects; and there is but one vision of each thing exact and "conformable to the object", just as there is but one scientific formula for each fact. Old Grandet's portrait "is a good likeness" or it "is not"; Madame de Mortsauf "is true to life" or she "is not". One cannot express two judgments on Célestin Crevel or on César Birotteau; and against such evidence no sophistry—or infirmity—can prevail.

Once more, it is curious that such a lesson should stand out with equal clearness from two works so diverse as *The Human Comedy* and the *Treatise on Positive Philosophy*, conceived and realised in such different environments, separated from each other, if I may so express it, by such moral distance; but the fact is undoubted; and certainly it will be thought that it deserves bringing out, in the first place, because of its own interest; also, for the light which it may help to shed on

the trend of ideas about 1840; and, lastly, because of the authority which it may give to certain ideas, for the sake of whose verisimilitude and probability it is not a matter of indifference that they should have the backing of two so different and so powerful minds as a Comte and a Balzac.

CHAPTER VII

THE MORALITY OF BALZAC'S WORKS

In giving such an exact and complete representation of life, it was difficult for Balzac to avoid the reproach of "immorality"; and accordingly he did not escape it. He complained of it, ironically, in the preface of the second edition of his *Old Goriot*, and bitterly, in the introduction to his *Human Comedy:* "The reproach of immorality, which has never been spared the courageous writer, is the last one left to fling when one has nothing more with which to reproach a poet. If you are true in your portraitures, if by continuous labour day and night you succeed in writing the most difficult language in the world, then the word 'immoral' is thrown in your face. Socrates was immoral; Jesus Christ was immoral; both were persecuted in the name of the societies which they overthrew or reformed. When you want to destroy somebody, tax him with immorality." And, a few pages further on, in his desire to avoid reproach he adds: "I may perhaps be allowed to call attention to the number of irreproach-

able characters — irreproachable, that is, in respect to their virtue — in the parts of this work that have already been published: Pierrette Lorrain, Ursule Mirouet, Constance Birotteau, Eugénie Grandet, Marguerite Claës, Pauline de Villenoix, Madame Jules, Eve Chardon, Mademoiselle d'Esgrignon, Madame Firmiani, Agathe Rouget, Renée de Maucombe, besides many secondary characters who, although they do not stand out as prominently as these, nevertheless present to the reader the practice of domestic virtues: Joseph Lebas, Genestas, Benassis, the curé Bonnet, Doctor Minoret, Pillerault, David Séchard, the two Birotteaus, the curé Chaperon, Judge Popinot, Bourgeat, the Sauviats, the Taschérons, and many others—do they not solve the difficult literary problem which consists in making a virtuous character interesting?" But his justification was not heeded, and even in our time one meets with critics or historians of literature who still reproach Balzac for his immorality. To what extent does he deserve it? I must look into this somewhat closely, for I fear, to speak the truth, that there is here a question of a rather serious misapprehension, and that there is a mistake, not only as to what must be called by the name of "morality in art", a vague and ill-defined thing, but as to the very

conditions of the novel. Ought a "representation of life" to be more "moral" than is life itself? For what reasons, in the name of what principles? And if it were decided that it ought to be, what then would become of that exactness of reproduction without which there can be no "representation of life"?

In what, then, does this immorality consist? And are we, together with Sainte-Beuve, to see it in what he called the "Asiatic character" of Balzac's style? The passage is too good not to be quoted in full: "I like, in the style of M. de Balzac," wrote Sainte-Beuve, in 1850, the very day after the death of the great novelist, and before professors of rhetoric had gotten hold of his work to compare it with the "models", "I like this *efflorescence* (I can find no other word) by means of which he gives to everything the sensation of life, and makes the very page thrill. But I cannot accept, under cover of physiology, the continual abuse of this same quality, or that style so often titillating and languorous, so enervated, roseate, and streaked with every tint, that style so delightfully corrupt, quite Asiatic, as our masters would say, more exhausted and languid than the body of an ancient Greek mime. Does not Petronius, in the midst of the scenes he describes, somewhere regret what

he calls *oratio pudica*, chaste style, which does not give itself over to the movement of every impulse?" *

For my part, I do not consider that anywhere in his work does Balzac's style, whatever one may think of it otherwise, have those qualities of seduction, of immodest and graceful perverseness, of subtle penetration, and expert *fluidity*, that Sainte-Beuve ascribes to it. There is in the very nature of Balzac an inborn *indelicacy*, or, if one might so express it, a *non-delicacy*, which is the contrary of the flexibility and refinement which such qualities would imply. But there is one thing that is seen with wonderful clearness—and especially for having been seen during the very lifetime of Balzac, or nearly so—and that is the connection between his "manner of writing" and his "immorality", inasmuch as they both are necessary consequences of his conception of the novel. The irregularity of his style and the immorality of his work go hand in hand; and they do so, perhaps, solely because of the very resemblance of his novels to life.

I am tempted to believe this when I see that under the name of immorality he is reproached for subjects like that of *Old Goriot*,

* *Monday Chats*, vol. II, Monday, September 2, 1850.

La Rabouilleuse, *Cousin Pons*, or *Cousin Bette*, which, I admit, are not stories

> "for little girls
> Whose bread is cut in slices small";

but which, none the less, stand in the first rank of his masterpieces, and from which no moralist would venture to propose to cut anything away. I will admit, furthermore, that in a general way, in *The Human Comedy*, Balzac's scoundrels and villains, or his eccentrics—Vautrin himself, the Vautrin of *Old Goriot*, and his Nucingen, Philippe Bridau, Grandet, Claës, Du Tillet, Gobseck, Hulot, and Marneffe—conduct themselves in a way quite different from that of his "well-bred people", and especially do they stand out more prominently. Balzac's well-bred people too often resemble perfect blockheads: his David Séchard, for instance—although sublime—or his two Birotteaus; and the virtue of some of his heroines, Eugénie Grandet, for example, or Agathe Rouget, is not free from a certain amount of simpleness. What more shall I say? That his pessimism "makes ugliness uglier"? That in his work crime or vice is not often enough punished, nor is virtue always sufficiently rewarded? And that humanity, however little we may think of it, is yet better than the idea of it

which we get from *The Human Comedy?* It is, indeed, a little of all this that is meant when one spcaks of the immorality of the Balzac novel; and even if he were guilty on all these counts, which is not at all proved, I should still defend him from this reproach of immorality.

After all, we must take things as they are, and especially when they concern, as they do in this case, a work and a man having no other ambition than to represent them. Supposing that Balzac's work were nothing but a rogue's gallery or an asylum for the demented, would it, even so, be richer in these kinds of monsters than the work of Shakespeare or even that of "the great Corneille"? The tragic poets of the past enjoy, in truth, a singular privilege! Whether it be an Æschylus in his *Agamemnon* or a Sophocles in his *Œdipus Rex*, a Shakespeare in his *Hamlet* or his *King Lear*, a Corneille in his *Rodogune*—the one of his tragedies which he preferred to all the others—or a Racine in his *Bajazet*, the dramatist ordinarily portrays only shocking criminals; and whether drama or tragedy, when you reduce all these masterpieces to the essential point of their plot, the question is, literally, only to know which of the two will cut the other one's throat: Ægisthus or

Agamemnon, Hamlet or his mother, Rodogune or Cleopatra. Yet neither Corneille, nor Shakespeare, nor Æschylus has been charged with being immoral; on the contrary, people agree to recognise in them "professors of moral energy", as they are called nowadays. Why is that? Does crime change its name when it is committed by "sovereign persons"? If formerly—and not without some reason—it may have been thought so, no one believes it to-day, or at any rate we should find it difficult to get any one to admit it. Only, in that case, let us bring ourselves to renounce criticisms whose apparent strength, resting only upon these conventionalities, totters or crumbles to pieces with them. There is no more *immorality* in the subject of *The Last Incarnation of Vautrin* than there is in the usual subjects of classic drama or tragedy: there is only more improbability, and the means used are more extravagant, as they are, besides, in *Hernani*, *Ruy Blas*, or *The Burgraves*.

But, it will be said, *Ruy Blas* and *Rodogune*, *Bajazet* and *Hamlet*, *Œdipus* and *Agamemnon*, that is history! and history——Yes, I know, history has all rights, not excepting that of falsifying truth to adapt it to the needs of poets! After all, are we quite sure that that sort of thing is history? And if it is, then

this question of morality or immorality assumes its full significance. The novel, a description and representation of contemporary life, claims the same rights as history, which is a chronicle and restoration of the life of the past. In the name of what shall we refuse them? If this "representation of life" was not, before Balzac, the proper and sole object of the novel, I have shown that since Balzac, and through him, it has become so. It has become not only its object, but its *raison d'être*. Who will limit the extent of this representation? For the reasons on account of which one would attempt to limit it would condemn, on the ground of immorality, the teaching of history itself. Why refuse Balzac what we allow Saint-Simon? And if it is claimed that Saint-Simon's characters have this much in their favour, that they existed, what matters it to us, since we know them only through him? Is not poetry often "truer" than history? And which of the two is the more "romantic", Rastignac or the famous Lauzun?

What, then, does it all mean? And, under the name of immorality, is it not Balzac's conception of art which is disputed and resisted? Is it not the right which the novel has claimed, since Balzac, to the "total representation of life", which is refused recognition? Although

our critics and historians of literature do not seem to be aware of it, art is still, in their eyes, as in the eyes of our masters, from Boileau to Sainte-Beuve, only a "selection", and hence a limitation. The principle of this limitation and the reason for this selection may, moreover, vary in different schools, and especially from one epoch to another; and the variation may even reach the point of contradiction. The object of art, for our classicists, has been to define the characteristics of average humanity; and, upon that basis, their aim has been the perfecting of civil life. "Homer and so many other poets, whose works are as serious as they are agreeable, *extol only the arts which are useful to humanity*, breathe only the public weal, country, society, and that *admirable civility* which I have explained." It is Bossuet who expresses himself thus; it is the lesson to be deduced from Boileau's *Art of Poetry* (*L'Art poétique*); it is one of those which might be drawn from La Fontaine's fables and Molière's comedies; it is also and especially Voltaire's opinion. Literature has a social function: art is, with our classicists, something very different from play. And, with such a conception of art, nothing is easier to conceive and to define than the morality or the immorality of a work of art.

The defining of it is not so easy when the object of art is, as with our romanticists, the manifestation of the artist's personality or the realisation of beauty. Let us waste no time in looking for this definition. But let us see, let us try to realise, that in either case, perfecting of civil life or realisation of beauty, whatever the principle or reason of the choice, art is always conceived as a choice; and, whether classicist or romanticist, the artist is therefore he who "separates", who distinguishes, and who chooses. His model—which, moreover, is always nature—being there before his eyes, he copies or reproduces from it, in the one case, neither anything that would serve as a bad example or prove harmful advice—for example, the perturbation or agitation of the senses; nor, in the case of the romanticist, anything that might mar the beauty or homogeneity of the representation; but in both cases he "chooses", since he rejects and retains, he exaggerates and attenuates, he combines and arranges, he shows and fails to show! This will be noticed even in the portrayal of the "monsters": Shakespeare's Iago or his Richard III., Corneille's Rodogune, Racine's Nero, Victor Hugo's Claude Frollo or his Don Salluste; and, with stronger reason, in the depicting of the "sympathetic characters": Desdemona or Cordelia, Chimène,

Iphigenia, La Esmeralda or Dona Maria of Neuburg. Exactness of imitation, however faithful it may be in the details, is subordinated to something else, and that is why neither in *Britannicus* nor in *Othello*—any more than in *Tartufe* and *The Misanthrope*, in *Gil Blas* and *Clarissa Harlowe*—is the exactness of imitation the standard or criterion of the value of the work of art or of the artist's intention.

But Balzac's conception of art is precisely the contrary of this system as it is of all systems which are akin to or resemble it—and there are more than one. There is no occasion to choose! Such is the lesson which his work teaches us, seeing that if we choose, we no longer "represent", as we eliminate, correct, and mutilate.

No, there is no occasion to make choice of subjects; and, indeed, what combinations have our novelists—I mean writers like Victor Ducange and Ponson du Terrail—ever invented that in complications and horrors and extravagances have not been surpassed by reality? This is fully seen when, by chance, there breaks out in our contemporary society —and am I not wrong in saying "by chance"? —one of those affairs that we agree in calling "scandalous", of which the trial in court all of a sudden discloses, as through a wide rent in the curtain which hid it from view, all

the ugliness of reality. Do we flatter ourselves that we can suppress this ugliness by failing to represent it? And, if we suppress its representation, what will become of the "resemblance to life"? That is why there is no more reason for choosing among the details which go to make up the expression of that resemblance than there is for choosing among the subjects. Do naturalists "choose", when they describe an animal or a plant, and do they retain for analysis only the noble parts, all the others being declared of lesser or of no interest? No, certainly not; and the reason for this is that a detail which for a long time has been looked upon as insignificant often turns out, unexpectedly, to be very important or essential. Who knows what the science of to-morrow will be? But, meanwhile, it is our duty to prepare for it very complete descriptions and to make exhaustive inventories of the characteristics of things. And, lastly, the novelist must not even make choice, so to speak, of his characters, or lean too plainly towards these or those. For sincerity of observation and exactness of "representation" would ill adapt themselves to this declared partiality of the observer and painter; and since all beings are equal in the eyes of science, inasmuch as they are objects of its observation, they ought therefore

to be equal in the eyes of art also, inasmuch as they are all objects of its "representation". This is what George Sand never would admit.

It is therefore evident that in reproaching Balzac for the "immorality" of some of his subjects, or the more subtle immorality which consists in describing the morals of his "monsters" as he would the most indifferent objects—with the same composure and the same "objectivity"—it is his conception of the novel for which he is reproached, and the right of the novel itself to be a "representation of life" is what is disputed. "Even were life as ugly as Balzac says it is," writes in this connection M. André Le Breton, his latest biographer, "the mission of a man of genius is not to lead us to misanthropy, but to pity and resignation. Or, rather, his mission is to reconcile us to this poor life so much slandered, to give us back our fine hopes and glowing illusions; and I shall always find it hard to believe that the optimism of Corneille and Hugo is not superior to the pessimism of Balzac." I quite agree; although, nevertheless, neither *Théodore* nor *Rodogune*, *Heraclius* nor *Pertharite*, which, I am very sure, are by Corneille, nor the novels or dramas of Hugo —even *Notre-Dame de Paris*, *The King Enjoys Himself*, *Ruy Blas*, and *Les Misérables*—

breathe so much optimism after all! But when it comes to deciding whether the "optimism of Corneille and Hugo" is or is not "superior to the pessimism of Balzac", it is very clear to me that there is a question of ethics involved; but a problem of æsthetics is not to be solved by a question of ethics—one shrinks from it; and the fact that truth is unpleasant, or even unbearable to contemplate, is not sufficient ground for condemning it when it appears in the novel.

I beg the reader to pay particular attention to this point: I am not here confounding, as Balzac would have wished, science with art; and I do not claim for art all the rights which are accorded science. Art is one thing, science another; and the object and the method of the two, therefore, are not identical. Nor are they amenable to the same authority. I admit, furthermore, that if no limits can be placed to the researches and curiosity of science, one may, on the contrary, keep art within bounds, and oblige it, in a way, to respect certain conditions. And I will add that it is not solely from pure convention—whatever Balzac may have said, and Taine after him—that I deny or dispute the novelist's right to assume in the presence of man the lofty dispassionateness of the naturalist in the presence of the animal.

I simply say that this is not the question. The only question is to know whether the novel has, like history, or has not the inherent right of representing life in its entirety. If it has not, well and good!—the case has been heard; and it remains only to state what is to be the object of the novel, whether "to give us back our fine hopes and glowing illusions" or to display before our eyes the artist's virtuosity! But if the novel has the right to "represent life in its entirety", it then must have the same liberty as history, which, as far as I know, has never been reproached for telling us the whole truth about things and men of the past. I say that this—the right of representing life in its entirety—is the right, nothing more, but nothing less, that Balzac claimed; and he forever won it for the novel. Not only has the novel the right to "represent", as does history, "life in its entirety", but this right, since Balzac, is properly its *raison d'être*, and it could not be disputed without bringing back this literary form to the mediocrity of its classic character.

If we accept this definition of the novel, there will hardly be more than two ways of being "immoral" left the novelist, or even, as with the historian, only one way; and that will be to err, voluntarily or involuntarily, in re-

gard to the relative importance of facts in the life of humanity as a whole. The model, in this respect, of a perfectly immoral historian is old Michelet, with his mania for seeing in history only "women's intrigues"—and, no doubt, there are many, and often regrettable ones, there; but, after all, they are not the whole of history; and even the history of the reign of Louis XV. or Catherine the Great cannot be summed up solely by such things. But, as I have said, this is precisely what Balzac was careful not to do, and what one ought to admire in his *Comedy*, or, to express it better, in the plan of his *Human Comedy*, is the endeavour that he made to proportion the number and importance of his studies to the real importance of things. If he was mistaken in the number or the true nature of the springs by which men are moved; if he did not give prominence enough to the passions of love; and if, on the other hand, he gave too much to hate, avarice, and ambition, that is another matter! But he endeavoured to make no mistake; the question ceased to be a question of morality; and undoubtedly it is no fault of his, but that of the society of his day, if, in the picture of it which he left us, the representation of vice is more "copious", if I may so speak, than is that of virtue.

Furthermore, did he go too far in this representation of vice? And did he, in his novels—which would be another way of being "immoral"—dwell, with a complacency that is in bad taste, on certain details which we are all agreed should be merely outlined? Taine somewhere seems to imply as much. "There was in him an exuberance of animal life," he tells us. "This is too often apparent in his novels. He ventures upon many a detail of secret history, not with the composure of a physiologist, but with the kindling eyes of an epicure and gourmand who, through a half-opened door, looks with relish at some savoury and gratuitous repast."* This is saying a good deal, and one might wish, in order to judge them, that Taine, without reproducing them, had at least indicated where to find these details of "secret history" which are the cause of Balzac's "kindling eyes". If there are some in the *Droll Stories*, I know of some that are "cynical" in *The Human Comedy* also, but very few that might be termed "libertine"; and this delicate distinction is everything. So that Balzac's "immorality", in truth, is only a form of his "coarseness" or "vulgarity". I hope

* *New Essays in Criticism and History* (*Nouveaux Essais de Critique et d'Histoire*), third edition, 1880, p. 61.

that Balzacians will not protest too loudly against these two words, and that they understand that coarseness and vulgarity are also, possibly, conditions without which life cannot be fully and completely "represented".

Evidently, it is easy to be neither "coarse" nor "vulgar" when one portrays, on the stage or in the novel, only "very distinguished" persons, who, amid most sumptuous furniture or aristocratic scenery, converse only on very gallant or elevated subjects. But one cannot always succeed; and it has happened that even Balzac failed in this respect just when it was especially important for him to succeed, and when, moreover, he spared neither the subtleties of his analysis nor the efforts, or rather contortions, of his style. I do not say he failed as regards his "people in high life", his great lords and duchesses. Sainte-Beuve —who lived at the same time and among the same people—vouched for their being good likenesses. "Who, better than Balzac, has portrayed the old men and the belles of the Empire? *Who, especially, has given a more delightful picture of the duchesses and viscountesses of the end of the Restoration?*" I prefer this testimony of Sainte-Beuve, who knew, in their declining years, some of these "viscountesses" and "duchesses", Madame de Beauséant and

Madame de Langeais, to the opinion of a few worthy university men and austere magistrates who fail to find in these ladies their ideal of elegance, distinction, and aristocracy. But it is in a general way that Balzac is "coarse", as he is "vulgar", almost without being aware of it, and simply because there are things that are beyond him, which is, in every art, the true and, I will venture to say, the only right way of being vulgar and coarse. One does not paint like a Jordaens if one has the temperament of a Van Dyck, although both are Flemish and both are of the school of Rubens. Likewise, one can create neither a Gaudissart nor a Bixiou without having some of their traits. But what a pity it would be if we had neither Bixiou nor Gaudissart! And if these really are types of their time, should we wish that Balzac had kept them out of his work on the ground of their not being sufficiently distinguished persons?

Here again, if we accept the novel as a "representation" of life, whose first merit lies in its exactness, the same question recurs: "Did Balzac go too far? And does life, which a moment ago did not appear to us more immoral as it is to be found in his work than it is in reality, appear in his work 'coarser' or more 'vulgar' than nature?" I repeat that I do not believe it.

I make allowance for his temperament, which had nothing aristocratic about it, in spite of his doctrines, and whose inborn vulgarity neither Madame de Berny nor the Countess Hanska succeeded in modifying in any marked degree. But the real explanation, which is not given by most of his critics, is that, the object of the novel being to "represent life", the "model" changed in the time intervening between Le Sage's *Gil Blas* and Balzac's *Cousin Bette*. Or, in still other words, the evolution in the history of the modern novel, which was Balzac's great work, is itself but the expression of an evolution in manners which was taking place at the same time; and herein, precisely, lies Balzac's incomparable originality. While around him his rivals in popularity, when they do not, as did Dumas or Eugène Sue, write simply to entertain, or, even less than that, to exploit their talent, copy from the life of their time only, so to speak, what had been copied at all times—which method allows us to-day to compare, for instance, *Manon Lescaut* with *The Lady with the Camellias* (*La Dame aux Camélias*)—Balzac devotes himself to the new characters, the singularities "as yet unseen", which his time offers to his observation; and this is precisely what readers brought up on the classics find it extremely hard to forgive

him. That which displeases them in his manner of conceiving and representing life is the very thing that shocks them in his style, which they consider, if I may so express it, scandalously "modern". But the same considerations continue to justify him, and if his portraits are good likenesses, we therefore ought not to reproach Balzac alone, or him chiefly, on account of his "coarseness" or "vulgarity".

Let it then be said that during the last one hundred and fifty or two hundred years profound changes have taken place in the innermost structure of modern societies; that perhaps not the least of these changes is the one which has overturned the relations of the conditions and the hierarchy of the social classes; and that morality itself, always immutable in its principles, although diverse in its applications, could not have helped experiencing the counter-stroke of these changes; this may be said, it must be said, and one is right in saying it! It is these changes of which the Balzac novel in a way bears the record. The Balzac novel is "vulgar" to the extent that life itself has become vulgar in the last two centuries by submitting to new requirements; and it is "coarse" to the extent that, even if we are not singly and in-

dividually coarser than our fathers, it cannot be denied, however, that modern civilisation has, in a general way, developed coarseness.

Is this what has sometimes been meant in speaking of the "democratic" character of Balzac's work? And I well know that when this was said it met with the answer that art always was "aristocratic"; but that is only a quibble, if it is not nonsense. It is possible that an artist is always something of an "aristocrat"; and it is also possible that the existence of an aristocracy is necessary to the development of art—the example of Athens or Florence would certainly not prove the contrary—but it is none the less true that a work of art may bear a more or less "democratic" stamp; and such is the case with the rubicund countenances of Jordaens as compared with Watteau's beribboned shepherds. It is also the case with Balzac's novels. I am not speaking of the features under which he represented aristocracy, which are like a perpetual satire, all the more bitter because often unconscious. See, in *The Old Maid*, the character of Chevalier de Valois, or, in *Lost Illusions*, the picture of "high life" in Angoulême under the Restoration. See, also, all the Chaulieu family in the *Recollections of Two Young Brides*. But Balzac's novels are demo-

cratic because of the meeting and mingling of all social conditions which is to be found in them, including those which, before Balzac, were portrayed only to be turned into ridicule. They are democratic because of the means used to succeed, which have nothing, or almost nothing, in common with those used, for instance, in the *Memoirs* (*Mémoires*) of Saint-Simon. They are democratic because of the nature of the sentiments by which the characters are prompted; and the best of these sentiments are seldom free from a little of that envy which, far more than "virtue"—whatever Montesquieu may have said—is the principle of democracies. They are democratic by reason of the mistrust shown of "individualism", for individualism is, on the other hand, the principle of aristocracies. They are democratic on account of the qualities as well as the defects of a style in whose torrent are indiscriminately mingled expressions taken from the slang of all trades, metaphors derived from the exercise of all professions, and puns and jokes picked up in all sorts of environments. They are democratic, furthermore, from the very air one breathes in them, the glittering promises of fortune and success they hold out to youth, and the manner in which the gratification of all desires is offered as a

prize to the equalitarian instinct, nobody being forbidden the satisfaction of his ambition, or having it restrained by any prejudice. And, lastly, they are democratic because of their exactness in reproducing the might of that social movement whose prodigious and rapid spread, in spite of all opposition and obstacles, will no doubt be accounted in the future the essential and characteristic phenomenon of the nineteenth century. And that is why, when they are called democratic, the expression may possibly displease a few dilettanti; it may require explaining, as I am attempting to explain it at this very moment; it might have astonished Balzac, and, if you like, made him indignant; but the meaning is perfectly plain, and it is expressed as clearly as is possible in one word.

My conclusion, then, as regards the "morality" of Balzac's novels, is that they are, properly speaking, neither "moral" nor "immoral", but simply what they are and what they had to be, inasmuch as they are a "representation" of the life of his time. They are immoral as history and life are immoral, which amounts to saying that they are therefore as "moral" as history and life are, since undoubtedly, at a given time of their evolution, they could not be otherwise than they are. Read

certainly one may be allowed to think that the "lessons" they teach—if, after all, it is their province to teach lessons; and, for my part, I doubt it—are not the best lessons, or even true ones—I mean, such that they ought to be followed. But I do not see how any reproach can be addressed to him who, like Balzac, confines himself to recording them; or at least—to repeat—it is not his "morality" that one incriminates in that case; it is the conception that he has formed of his art, and what is contested is the value or "legitimacy" of that conception. I have attempted to show that this could hardly be contested except in the name of an ideal of art henceforth abolished. It now remains for me to show that the legitimacy of this conception is proved in another way—by the increasing, extensive, even universal influence which it has wielded over Balzac's contemporaries and successors.

CHAPTER VIII

THE INFLUENCE OF BALZAC

"However rapid and great the success of M. de Balzac in France," wrote Sainte-Beuve, in 1850, "it was perhaps still greater and more undisputed throughout Europe. The details that might be given in regard to this would seem fabulous, and would only be true. . . . More than two centuries ago, in 1624, Honoré d'Urfé, the author of the famous novel *Astræa* (*L'Astrée*), who was living in Piedmont, received a very earnest letter addressed to him by twenty-nine German princes or princesses and nineteen great lords; these personages informed him that they had taken the names of the heroes and heroines of *Astræa*, and had formed themselves into an Academy of True Lovers. What happened to D'Urfé on this occasion was literally repeated in the case of Balzac. There was a time when, in Venice, for instance, a company which happened to gather there conceived the notion of taking the names of his principal characters, and playing their parts. For a whole season nothing but Rastignacs, Duchesses of Langeais, and

Duchesses of Maufrigneuse were to be seen, and it is asserted that more than one actor or actress in this society comedy was desirous of carrying out the part to the end. . . .

"What I say of Venice was repeated in various degrees in other places. In Hungary, Poland, and Russia M. de Balzac's novels laid down the law. . . . For example, those costly and odd pieces of furniture, in the description of which he made use, according to his fancy, of the masterpieces of twenty countries and twenty epochs, afterwards became a reality; what seemed to us the dream of a millionaire artist was copied with exactitude; people furnished their rooms *à la Balzac.*"

From among the many evidences that might be mentioned of Balzac's influence over his contemporaries, not only in France but abroad, I have chosen this one as being one of the most characteristic, and, at the same time, one of the most precise. It is also one of those least open to suspicion; for Sainte-Beuve never forgave Balzac for presuming to rewrite *Soul's Delight* in *The Lily of the Valley*, or for having dared to meddle with *Port-Royal;* or, finally and especially, for having attempted in the novel what he, Sainte-Beuve, was trying to do, in his own way, in criticism and in the history of literature.

The revival of criticism by Sainte-Beuve's methods or processes is, indeed, in the history of that form a revolution of the same kind as the one Balzac brought about in the novel. With differences which hardly need pointing out, because they, so to speak, strike the eye—while, on the other hand, similarities escape our notice—there is greater relation, and closer relation, than one would think between *Port-Royal* and *The Human Comedy;* and they both are, in our French literature of the nineteenth century, two monuments of a like and original nature. Sainte-Beuve is more "lettered", Balzac more "contemporaneous"; the critic is at every turn troubled, worried, hampered, paralysed, by scruples for which the novelist cares nothing; the two minds are not of the same family; but their curiosity is analogous, the curiosity of a physiologist and of a physician. If there exists a style "more exhausted and languid than the body of an ancient Greek mime", it may be Balzac's, but it is also Sainte-Beuve's. And, lastly, what they both sought by a means whose metaphor-burdened style is itself but the consequence of what they sought, was the "representation" or "reproduction of life".

There lies the secret of their influence; and, as far as Balzac is more particularly concerned,

perhaps it is for this reason that his influence was exercised on life before being exercised on literature. "The novelist begins," also said Sainte-Beuve, an observant and interested witness of the transformation, "he reaches the heart of things and exaggerates a little; society is put on its mettle, and 'does things'; and thus it is that what at first may have appeared exaggerated ends by being no longer unlikely." *The Human Comedy* transformed manners before it gave new life to the stage, the novel, and history. By what means? The subtle critic has just told us. And in what manner? That is what I have just attempted to indicate, in considering the social bearing of Balzac's work. A previous transformation of manners alone made possible the revival of the stage, the novel, and history, under the influence of Balzac.

A complaisant criticism has for a long time dated the revival of the stage from 1852, or from *The Lady with the Camellias;* and the younger Alexandre Dumas did not gainsay it. But, in reality, *The Lady with the Camellias*, an adaptation of the classic theme of the "courtesan in love" to the unreasonable demands of the boulevard, renewed nothing at all, as it contained in itself nothing new, and was, in truth, only "very Parisian" ro-

manticism. The plays which really brought about the revival of the stage, about 1855 or 1856, are those like *The Hypocrites* (*Les faux Bonshommes*) of Théodore Barrière; *The Demi-monde* (*Le Demi-Monde*) of the younger Alexandre Dumas; *The Would-be Women of Fashion* (*Les Lionnes pauvres*) of Émile Augier, or his *Olympia's Marriage* (*Le Mariage d'Olympe*); and Balzac's influence is manifest in all of these.

This is all the more remarkable because Balzac himself, as I said, never could succeed in drama. Undoubtedly, it would be of little use to inquire into the reasons, one by one, for Balzac's poor success on the stage. But as one cannot deny to some of Balzac's novels the quality of being "dramatic", this is one proof more that the "dramatic" and the "theatrical" are two different things; and it is also a proof of the error committed when one persists in tracing to the same causes the æsthetics of the drama and those of the novel. A novel might easily be made, after the manner of Balzac, out of *The Would-be Women of Fashion* or *The Demi-monde;* but no drama could be made out of *The Cabinet of Antiques*—or if it were done, of all dramas it would be the most vulgar—nor, indeed, could a comedy be made out of *The Old Maid* or *César Birotteau*.

By what means, then, and in what manner has Balzac's influence made itself felt on the stage? Simply by forcing, henceforth, upon the plays of writers like Augier, Barrière, and Dumas a more exact and conscientious imitation of life. For the plot, properly speaking, they went on drawing their inspiration from the examples of the elder Dumas and especially from Eugène Scribe—who had in no wise been dispossessed by *The Lady with the Camellias* of the sway they both exercised, at that time, on the stage—but these newcomers attempted to bring into play less conventional interests than those which were the springs of action in *Bondage* or in *Camaraderie* (*La Camaraderie*), in *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle* or in *The Young Ladies of Saint-Cyr* (*Les Demoiselles de Saint-Cyr*); they strove to portray, or to show in action, less artificial characters, which would be real characters and no longer only "stage parts".

Therein, indeed, lay the especial defect of the stage of Balzac's time. "Vaudeville" or comedy, drama—and I might say comic or grand opera libretto, *The Ambassadress* (*L'Ambassadrice*) or *The Prophet* (*Le Prophète*)—whatever the subject of a scenario of Scribe or of the elder Dumas, the same "fathers of noble birth" and the same "lovers", the same

"ingénues" and the same "coquettes" were always to be found in them. The portrayal of manners consisted only in dressing them, as occasion might require, as "admirals" or "magistrates", as "great ladies" or "society women", as prefects or bankers; and as for their characteristics, it seemed as if it were left to the actors to give them some consistency by lending them their own personalities. And this amounts to saying that the stage had become an art *sui generis*, or rather a game by itself, which had its own rules, as has backgammon or chess, whose "pawns", always the same, differed in one game and another only in their position; an art whose chief aim was to invent as many difficulties as possible in order to have the honour of getting out of them; and an art which, on these conditions, might not entirely do without but might content itself with a minimum of observation, human interest, and style. I do not call it "human interest" to know whether Raoul, who is anybody you please, will marry Valentine, or whether Emmanuel, who is nobody, will loosen "the chains of flowers" which bind him to Valérie. Is any one still curious to know how the Marchioness of Prie succeeded in saving Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle from Richelieu's attacks?

It was Balzac's influence which destroyed this conception of dramatic art. Other aims, later on, may have mingled, in the new dramatists, with this purpose of giving a closer imitation of life: Théodore Barrière believed he had in himself the making of a satirist, and the younger Alexandre Dumas thought himself to be cut out for the rôle of a reformer! But this idea, that the stage as well as the novel ought to "represent life", none the less penetrated men's minds from that time on; and, together with this idea, Balzac's influence is discovered, more active than ever, even in our day, in *The Parisian* (*La Parisienne*) and *The Crows* (*Les Corbeaux*); and it is in a manner stripped, in Henri Becque, of all that still concealed it in the younger Dumas and in Émile Augier.

Now, if one inquires how Balzac's influence made itself felt first on the stage, whereas one would think that it ought to have been exercised first of all on the novel, I will give this reason, that if Balzac's contemporaries indeed did not "misappreciate" him, yet they did not at once "recognise" how different were his novels from those of George Sand, Alexandre Dumas, Eugène Sue, and Prosper Mérimée. It would not have required much urging to make Sainte-Beuve declare that *Carmen* or *The Venus of Ille* was far above *The Cabinet of Antiques*

or the *Recollections of Two Young Brides;* and if, as early as 1850, Alexandre Dumas was looked upon as not much more than a novel-monger, Eugène Sue's reputation fully equalled Balzac's. I say nothing of George Sand, whose style, being, it was admitted, "of the first stamp and quality", placed her in the very front rank. Accordingly, while it had at once been perceived—and this required neither very highly trained nor penetrating eyes—how much more "reality" there is in the Balzac novel than in Scribe's plays, it was not so clearly seen what a difference there is between *The Poor Relations* and, for instance, *The Devil's Recollections* (*Mémoires du Diable*) or *The Mysteries of Paris.* It was all the less perceived because neither Soulié nor Eugène Sue is really a paltry novelist, and because, *The Poor Relations* having appeared as a feuilleton, as had also novels of Sue and Soulié, it had been very superficially concluded that Balzac's novels also belonged in the same category as the "feuilleton novel"—which at that time was not quite of the nondescript class. I will not deny that Balzac himself encouraged this confusion by putting into the stories of *Cousin Pons* and *Cousin Bette*, for the subscribers of *La Presse* and *Le Constitutionnel*, more elements of "melodrama" than were

necessary. In *Cousin Bette*, Baron Montès de Montejanos is not even a character of the Sue stamp, but rather of the Dumas; and has it been noticed that Balzac required no less than seven corpses in order to bring about the dénouement of the plot?

It is for this reason that, while the stage was rather quickly freeing itself from the influence of Scribe and Dumas, to submit in turn to Balzac's, it cannot really be said that the novel resisted his influence, but rather it was subjected to other influences, and more particularly, between 1850 and 1860, to that of George Sand. Jules Sandeau's novels, *Mademoiselle de la Seiglière* or *Briefs and Pedigrees* (*Sacs et Parchemins*)—which, however, are a little anterior to this period—and the first novels of Octave Feuillet, as *The Romance of a Poor Young Man* (*Le Roman d'un jeune Homme pauvre*) or *Bellah*, are sufficient evidence of this. Not that even in *Bellah*, and in *Briefs and Pedigrees*, from which was to be taken *M. Poirier's Son-in-law* (*Le Gendre de M. Poirier*) written in collaboration with Augier, one may not recognise more than one trait of Balzac's influence. But neither Sandeau nor especially Feuillet had any leaning toward the imitation of reality. Both of them romanticists, they were also idealists after the manner

of George Sand. "Representation of life" was by them subordinated to considerations of another sort. And, to say nothing more of that sterile Sandeau—whose *House of Penarvan* (*La Maison de Penarvan*), published in 1857, was to be almost his last work—it was quite along the lines of *Indiana*, *Valentine*, and *Mauprat* that Feuillet's talent continued to develop, with the *History of Sybil* (*Histoire de Sybille*) and *Monsieur de Camors;* and his was to be the rôle of attacking or contradicting, at first with more or less discretion, then with absolute frankness, the theses or ideas of George Sand; and he did this by appropriating the very means which she had used.

A worthy but unlettered man, who was to realise the miracle of making for himself, without any ability, a literary career of more than forty years' duration—I refer to the author of *The Bourgeois of Molinchart* (*Les Bourgeois de Molinchart*) and *The Sufferings of Professor Deltheil* (*Les Souffrances du Professeur Deltheil*) —was at that time almost the only one who endeavoured to follow in the footsteps of Balzac. And he sincerely admired him! But—so it is sometimes preordained—this Champfleury, whose last work was to be a *History of Caricature* (*Histoire de la Caricature*), scarcely perceived in *The Human Comedy* anything be-

yond the side of it that pertained to caricature; and I think that in his eyes the whole of Balzac, the real Balzac, or the best of Balzac, was to be found in his *Petty Bourgeois* or in his *Old Maid*. I have said what I think of Balzac's humour; it will not be amiss for me to quote one more example of it, in order to make plain the case of Champfleury. In *The Old Maid*, when Mademoiselle Cormon, by giving her hand to Du Bousquier, irretrievably disappoints the hopes of the Chevalier de Valois, the Chevalier, who until then has been the most particular man in his dress to be found in Alençon, grows careless about his personal appearance. "His linen became rusty, and his hair was not combed regularly. Some ivory teeth disappeared without observers of the human heart being able to discover to what corps they had belonged, whether to the foreign or the home legion, or to the vegetable or the animal kingdom—whether age had extracted them from the chevalier or whether they had been forgotten in the depths of the drawer of his dressing-table." Imagine three hundred pages of this kind of wit: they are to be found in *The Bourgeois of Molinchart*, where, in truth, one does not know which to marvel at more, the quality of his humour or the overwhelming air of superiority to his char-

acters that this "perfect noodle" of a Champfleury gives himself, at the same time that he crushes them with his scorn. That is what Champfleury called his "realism"; and one can easily understand that nobody was won over to his side by his preaching or example. But he injured, he greatly injured Balzac. Champfleury's *Bourgeois of Molinchart* and also his criticism for a while gave sanction to the idea that "realism" was only a medium for caricature, and that if Balzac's great superiority had any existence, it was indeed to be found in this very caricature—in his *Old Maid*, his *Gaudissart*, his *Pierre Grassou*, his *Employees*, his *Petty Bourgeois*—and, generally and in one word, in his "satire", but not in his "pictures" of the manners of his time.

It was in the midst of all this that in 1858 *Madame Bovary*, with its consequent success, scandal, and prosecution, burst upon the public; and, doubtless, nothing would to-day be more natural or more alluring than to date Balzac's influence on the contemporary novel from that very year. But that would be another error! It is quite true that J. J. Weiss, a critic too much forgotten to-day, did not hesitate at the very outset to rank Flaubert's novel among the masterpieces of what he plain-spokenly called "brutal literature", very

close to which category he placed—and this was showing considerable acumen—Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* (*Fleurs du Mal*), together with Théodore Barrière's *Hypocrites* and *The Money Question* (*La Question d'Argent*) of the younger Alexandre Dumas. But we have in our possession, for that period, a very extensive *Correspondence* of Flaubert—with Louise Colet—a correspondence which is almost exclusively literary, and from which, while Flaubert admired Balzac as a matter of course, one does not gather that he had much in common with him; and, as a matter of fact, his "realism", or "naturalism", had quite another origin. Flaubert at that time was first of all a "romanticist", and a few years later *Salammbô* was to be a further proof of it.

Is it necessary to add that the significance of *Madame Bovary* was not at first understood? Certainly it was in no wise regarded as a continuation or resumption of the Balzac novel; and, indeed, if there is in contemporary literature an original work, surely conceived without any definite model, it is *Madame Bovary*. Flaubert's "naturalism" may be defined with a few strokes analogous to those which I employed to characterise Balzac's, but it did not draw its inspiration from him; and accordingly Flaubert was generally given credit

or reproached only for being the author of his work, but not for having copied or borrowed it from any one else. His style would of itself have been sufficient to prevent this; and, in fact, that style alone was enough to proclaim that the purpose of the author of *Madame Bovary* was in no wise to "represent life"—which he "execrated" (that is the word he uses) as much as Balzac had loved it—but rather to make use of life to realise a theory or an ideal of art. I may point out cursorily that this is one of the reasons why it displeased Flaubert exceedingly to be always called the author of *Madame Bovary*. That is because, instead of a novel of real life, he would have wished us to see in it only a work of art, and a work of art of the same nature as *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (*La Tentation de Saint Antoine*) or *Salammbô*, since *Madame Bovary* was only an application of the same method of art to the description of provincial manners.

Will our novelists believe it? It is to criticism, of which Balzac spoke so ill—because, indeed, during his lifetime he had made his way without it, or had met with scarcely anything but ill-will from it—and to Taine in particular, that he is indebted for part of his fame. Would his fame otherwise be the same, and,

in the end, would his influence have been as considerable? I could not prove the contrary. But, as a matter of fact, it is to Taine's *Essay on Balzac* that the author of *The Human Comedy* owes it, from the point of view of literary history, that he was placed so entirely above his peers; placed "several cubits"—Balzac was fond of this expression—above the novelists who were his contemporaries, and finally proclaimed, "with Shakespeare and Saint-Simon, the greatest storehouse of documents on human nature in existence."

Even if Taine's celebrated *Essay*, as vigorous as it is brilliant, had done nothing except to give the signal for the taking up of Balzac by university criticism, that would have been something. In France, the "adoption" of an author by university criticism usually sanctions him as a writer; and, at all events, it puts him in the way of becoming a "classic". But, in addition, it was learnt in Taine's *Essay*—and, coming from the pen of a former pupil of the École Normale, it was almost a revolutionary lesson—that "good style"—for he did not say "style", but "good style"—"is the art of making people listen to you and understand you"; that "this art varies as the audience varies"; and that therefore there is "an infinite number of good styles:

there are as many as there are ages, nations, and great minds". Then followed a quotation, "the description of a day and of a bouquet", which Taine took from *The Lily of the Valley*—but he omitted to say that Balzac has not many pages of such beauty and brilliancy—and he concluded on this point with these words: "Oriental poetry has nothing more dazzling or magnificent; it is luxury and rapture; one floats through a heaven of fragrance and light, and all the delights of summer days penetrate the senses and the heart and thrill them with joy like unto that of a cloud of variegated butterflies flitting through the air. *Evidently this man, whatever may have been said and whatever he may have done, knew his own language; he knew it, indeed, as well as any one can know it, only he used it in his own way.*" No finer encomium was ever given to "Balzac's style"; and I myself—need I admit—after the lapse of half a century, would not assent to this without making some reservations. This is not yet the place to express them, and I will therefore confine myself to stating that as regards this question of style, on which university criticism has always affected to show itself fastidious, and even somewhat cavilling—which would do no harm if his grammar or his syntax were that of Molière and Saint-

Simon rather than Condillac's and Marmontel's —Balzac was fully vindicated.

And his vindication was just as complete as regards a second point, namely, his likening of "social history" to "natural history"; and, in this respect, it may even be inquired if Taine, not satisfied with becoming the champion of the novelist, had not already become his disciple. "In the eyes of the naturalist, man is not an independent and superior intelligence, sound in itself, capable of attaining by a single effort to truth and virtue, but only an elemental force, of the same order as other forces, receiving from circumstances its degree and direction." Would Stendhal or Mérimée perhaps have admitted this? But incontestably it would have been conceded neither by George Sand nor by the novelists who, as I have pointed out, draw their inspiration from her. And, in truth, the expression of these ideas—at that time considered more than bold, almost immoral—which was supported, stated with precision, perhaps exaggerated, a few years later, in the *History of English Literature* (*Histoire de la Littérature anglaise*), was to cause some scandal, even—or especially—among philosophers. But meanwhile these ideas vigorously championed the Balzacian conception of the novel against all other con-

ceptions of it; they made of the author of *The Human Comedy*, surrounded as he was by romanticists, an "observer" among visionaries; and, according to the dearest wish of his ambition, they applied to his work as a "poet" the words he would have used to praise a Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire or a Cuvier.

For the critic furthermore showed that if the novelist's "sorry anatomical method" is not free from drawbacks, it did not, at any rate, paralyse his "inventive faculties"; and if any one deserved the name of "creator", it was this "observer". To prove it, Taine analysed some of Balzac's "great characters"—those which he did not hesitate to compare to Shakespeare's "monomaniacs" or "monsters" —Philippe Bridau, in *La Rabouilleuse;* old Grandet, in *Eugénie Grandet;* and Baron Hulot, in *Cousin Bette.* He had the courage to say, in this connection, that "greatness is always beautiful, even in misfortune and crime"; to which I say, in my turn, that Æschylus and Shakespeare, Corneille and Racine, would assuredly have assented. And he used these words in concluding: "Balzac slowly kindles his fire and heats his furnace; one suffers from his exertions; one toils painfully with him in his dark, smoky workshops, where he prepares, by dint of science, the multifarious beacons

which he is going to erect by the million, whose concentrated fires, blending their lights, will illuminate the country. At last they are all ablaze; the spectator looks on, and he sees, less quickly, less easily, less splendidly with Balzac than with Shakespeare, but the same things, as far in space and in time." Coming from the pen of a critic, this was supreme praise, and such praise as no one had before given to Balzac. Henceforth the novelist's fame and influence would not cease to grow and increase as the critic himself gained in authority.

Indeed, it may be noticed that, dating from this time, the Balzacian conception of the novel began to prevail over other conceptions; or, rather, it absorbed them, in a way, and brought them over to itself. Let us say nothing of Eugène Sue, who had just died, or of the elder Dumas, who seemed to be occupied only in finding out how he could complete his disqualification for writing. Let us say nothing of Hugo, or of his *Les Misérables*, which appeared in 1862, and in which it is easy to recognise traces of Balzac's influence as well as that of Eugène Sue; and then Hugo, like Balzac, "wishes" to be—if I may so speak—and ought to be placed apart. But there can be no doubt of Balzac's influence on the last

manner of George Sand, whose masterpiece is *The Marquis of Villemer;* Balzac is to be found in the most celebrated of Feuillet's novels, I mean *Monsieur de Camors*, in which it might be shown that the author drew his inspiration directly from *The Lily of the Valley;* he is discovered in the novels of the brothers De Goncourt, *Renée Mauperin*, *Madame Gervaisais*, and *Germinie Lacerteux;* Flaubert himself came under his influence in his *Sentimental Education* (*L'Éducation sentimentale*); and especially is he to be found in the works of the young novelists who soon, under the impulsion of the most prolific and most discussed of them all, Émile Zola, were to unite to form the school of what was to be called "naturalism". One should not fail to recall, in this connection, that the author of *The Rougon-Macquarts* (*Les Rougon-Macquart*) had learnt to read, so to speak, in the *History of English Literature.*

Other influences, undoubtedly—and in a general history of the French novel in the nineteenth century it should not be forgotten—were, so to speak, added to Balzac's, and notably that of Dickens, whose popularity, moreover, dates in France only from the praise which Taine bestowed upon him, as upon Balzac—and perhaps in speaking of him as an English Balzac rather than as the true Dickens.

The English could not but show some surprise at it. The influence of Dickens is especially to be felt and seen in the novels of Alphonse Daudet: *Little What D'you Call him* (*Le Petit Chose*), *Fromont Junior and Risler Senior* (*Fromont jeune et Risler aîné*), *The Nabob* (*Le Nabab*), and *Numa Roumestan*. Flaubert also, at this time, contributed his share, and, as I have indicated, it can be recognised in a tendency to artistic effect and to studied nicety of style which was not exactly Balzac's tendency. Style, which for Balzac was only a "means", was for Flaubert an "end"; and hence, in the conception of the novel, differences might be shown which even reach the point of contradiction. I will also take note, if you like, of Stendhal's influence, but I will also remark that his influence was not very deep, and that it finally ended only in an immoderate glorification of the author of *The Chartreuse of Parma* (*La Chartreuse de Parme*)—that masterpiece of pretentious tedium—rather than in any modification of the novel. While Stendhal was praised, novelists continued to imitate Balzac. But all these "collateral" influences, so to speak, seem really to have been operative only to the extent that they were added to Balzac's influence; and it may be said that, for the last forty years, the form

of the Balzac novel has held its sway over our novelists, just as the form of Molière's comedy, for a hundred and fifty years, imposed itself on our dramatists.

This being admitted, shall I say that neither has been equalled? If the historic proof is to-day established in Molière's case, it is not in Balzac's; and although we live faster in these days than formerly, we must rejoice that it is still possible for the novel of the future to give us works like *Eugénie Grandet* and *César Birotteau*, *La Rabouilleuse* and *Cousin Bette*. Moreover, I do not in this study treat of "live questions", and I have been careful not to bring in living novelists. But one thing which I cannot refrain from pointing out is that, in a general way, while submitting to Balzac's influence, the naturalistic school singularly denatured, narrowed, and mutilated his conception of the novel. Thus it is that it made of the picture or representation of life a satire or a caricature of manners, as Champfleury did in *The Bourgeois of Molinchart;* and at the same time that the naturalistic school was departing from Balzac's conception, it was, in a way, lying in the very name of "naturalism". A true naturalist imitates, and does not ridicule. Thus it is, also, that, without being altogether ignorant of provincial France, the

naturalistic school did not, as the author of *An Inventor's Sufferings* and *The Muse of the Department* had done, consider itself, so to speak, "professionally" bound to recognise it; and, as a rule, it seemed to take an interest only in scenes of Parisian life. A few stories of a somewhat special character, however, such as those of Ferdinand Fabre—I still name only the dead—do not invalidate the truth of this statement. And, further, it is by thus always mixing with its observations polemical intentions, as in *The Rougon-Macquarts*—see, notably, *The Masterpiece* (*L'Œuvre*) and, again, *Pot-Bouille*, in which, if my memory serves me aright, kitchen-maids are led astray by reading Lamartine and George Sand—that the naturalistic school failed in the first of the principles it proclaimed, which was impartial observation. When Balzac wrote *The Lily of the Valley*, his purpose may have been to rewrite *Soul's Delight:* but there is hardly one of Zola's novels which is not written *against* those of Octave Feuillet and George Sand. His best novels, *The Dram-shop* (*L'Assommoir*) and *Germinal*, always episodical or anecdotal, are very far from having the value or social significance of the master's.

But the principle is none the less settled for the future, and there is every reason to believe

that, whatever modification in its form the novel may hereafter undergo, its proper object will none the less henceforth be "the representation of common life".

I have endeavoured in this study to show the importance of that very simple formula, and also that it implies, in its simplicity, I would willingly say its naïveté, a conception of the novel very different from the one which had prevailed up to Balzac's time. "Personal" novels will no doubt still be written, and so will novels of adventure; novels will be written to maintain a proposition, after the style of *The History of Sybil* and *Mademoiselle La Quintinie;* satirical novels will be written—but not, let us hope, after the manner of *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (*Bouvard et Pécuchet*). *Multæ sunt mansiones in domo.* No more in the future than in the past will all novel-writers dwell on the same floor. Moreover, is it not one of the most certain laws of literary history that a masterpiece, in any literary form and at any time during its life, creates for itself imitators? It is a demonstration of the axiom that "nothing is either lost or created". But the representation of life, common life, ambient life; life "not selected", if I may so speak, or narrowed by any bias of this or that school; life placed in its true setting, observed, studied, and reproduced

in what might be termed its infinitesimals, as well as in the great crises which sometimes convulse it; life always the same, and yet always modified by the sole and unique effect of its own development—such will be, in all likelihood, and for a long time yet, the proper and particular object of the novel. It was Balzac who brought this about in the same degree that Molière had brought about a change in comedy; and it is because he fixed the form of the novel along those lines that it turns out that, in the long run, his influence is just as great on historians as on the stage or in the novel.

"On reading the dry and tedious nomenclatures of facts called *histories*, who has not noticed that writers have forgotten, at all times, to give us the history of manners?" This sentence is from Balzac himself, in the introduction to his *Human Comedy;* and it explains the influence he exercised on the transformation of history. The credit for this transformation has been given to the natural progress of science and scholarship, to the example of a few great historians, to a more precise and extensive knowledge of the past, and to the more correct ideas which have been formed in regard to what is essential in the life of humanity—and this last is not, it has been said,

to know in what year Louis XIV. was born, and by whom the battle of Denain was won. But all these reasons, which are not reasons or causes, but rather indeed effects, do not explain to us how and why the minds of men awoke to these new matters of interest; and here once more we encounter the influence of Balzac. The Balzac novel gave back to history what it had itself received from the historical novel. Walter Scott had taught Balzac the value and significance of all those trifling details which before him had been looked upon as vulgar and unworthy the attention of the novelist. Balzac taught the new school of history that, in the same way that "life" could be "represented" in the present only with the aid and by means of details of this kind, so it could not, without resorting to them, be "revived in the past"—which no doubt is the object of history.

This is fully seen in the historical work of the brothers De Goncourt, so superior, and yet quite analogous, to their work as novelists. In their histories of *French Society during the Revolution* (*La Société française pendant la Révolution*) and *French Society under the Directory* (*La Société française sous le Directoire*)—as in the monographs which they devoted to Madame de Pompadour and to Saint-

Huberti, to Madame du Barry and to Sophie Arnould—they applied the same processes as in the composition of their *Renée Mauperin* or their *Germinie Lacerteux;* and these processes they derived directly from Balzac.

To take a given subject, or a given personage and epoch, and to gather and collect all the details, generally little known, which are to be obtained in regard to them—details scattered through memoirs, correspondences, lampoons, police reports, even through collections of posters and newspapers of the day; to compare all these documents, confront them, rectify them by means of one another, reconcile them when they are inconsistent, catalogue them, classify and interpret them; to add to these evidences, which are in writing, those furnished by iconography, which are to be found not only in museums, but at curiosity-dealers', in the shape of faïence-ware or umbrella-handles; to reconstruct the "setting" of the characters, and to recognise them or to divine who they were by the choice which they made as regards their furniture, the colour of the hangings and the shape of the bulging clothes-presses, by the designs worked in the pier-glasses, the figures represented on the clocks, and, if need be, by the make-up of their wardrobes: this, as I pointed out, is what Balzac had done, or

had professed to do, before the brothers De Goncourt—see, in his *Peasants*, the biography of Mademoiselle Laguerre which he there gives us; and—to pass over what the De Goncourts may have added to the method—they had only to reverse it in order to write histories resembling novels; which, moreover, would be read with infinitely more interest if they had not, as it were, effaced the great lines of history under too abundant details and excessive intricacies.

The reason for this is that they had not fully grasped the principle of the method; and, in this respect, their mistake was the same as that of the naturalistic school in the novel. They also mistook for and treated as an end what ought to be taken for and treated as a means. For talk and protests will not avail: "greater history" will always be greater history—political and military, diplomatic and legislative—as it has been understood by the great historians, from Herodotus to Michelet; and economic history, as, for instance, that of the price of commodities or that of the vicissitudes of agriculture, or even the history of manners, can never equal in interest the story of the Campaign of France, or that of the negotiations of the Congress of Vienna. There are many reasons for this. But what, moreover,

is very true is that, in order to understand those great events in history by which the fate of nations is decided, one cannot estimate with too much precision the "small causes" of which they are generally the great effects; and these small causes are just the ones that the Balzac novel strove to bring out: the temperament of the actors; daily interests as they may be threatened or injured; the trend of opinion; petty ambitions disguised under fine names; dramas of the inmost heart "from which the guard watching at the gates of the Louvre Does not protect kings"; rivalries, jealousies, hates, and, generally, all that goes to show that one is none the less a man for being a Louis XIV., or no less a woman for being an Empress Catherine—and one has even been known to be all the more human because of it. The introduction of this element of life into a conception of history which until then had relied for its dignity on its own aloofness, and the obligation, a new one for history, of going to the bottom of purely human and, in a way, daily causes of events—for this also history is indebted to Balzac.

I do not say that historians directly borrowed this conception from him. I might say it! And in support of my opinion I might invoke the example of Taine in *The Origins of Contem-*

porary France (*Les Origines de la France contemporaine*). There would be other examples, if I were to name the living, and M. G. Lenôtre and M. Frédéric Masson would doubtless willingly acknowledge their indebtedness to Balzac.

But it is indirectly that his action was especially felt—indirectly and diffusedly—through a slow infusion into men's minds, and without their being aware of it, by creating, so to speak, in the minds of his readers new needs and new requirements. "The writer's personality, his whole organisation, enters into and is brought out in his works; he does not write them with his brain alone, but with his blood and muscles. The physiology and hygiene of a writer have become one of the indispensable chapters in any analysis that is made of his talent." This sentence of Sainte-Beuve is probably familiar; but perhaps it has been forgotten that it was precisely in speaking of Balzac that he wrote it; and I ought to add, moreover, that in his essay he gave no more heed to the "physiology" or "hygiene" of Honoré de Balzac than I have done in the present study. So it is that principles are laid down; they are not applied; yet they are forced upon others! But how much truer is this remark of the actors in history! It is of a Mirabeau, a Danton, a Robespierre, a Napoleon, that it should be said that they

did not act with their "brain alone", but with their "blood and muscles"; and these are really the men on whose work light is thrown only by the knowledge of their "physiology" and "hygiene".

This also, then, is what we shall henceforth require history to tell us; and we shall require it because, since we have one and all read and reread Balzac's novels, we know the importance in the formation of a man's character, and in the history of his life, of his "hygiene" and "physiology". Or again, in other words, and speaking more generally, we have all acquired in our frequent reading of *The Human Comedy* such a need of precise and minute particulars in the representation of reality that nothing appears to us real and true except under the conditions which Balzac imposed upon the novel. And this explains his universal influence, which I have attempted to describe, if I might characterise it by saying that at the same time that Balzac gave to art for its sole object "the representation of reality", he created, in order to attain and accomplish this object, "a mode of representation of reality".

CHAPTER IX

BALZAC'S PLACE IN LITERATURE: CONCLUSIONS

It is not true that perfect beauty is "like pure water", which, it is claimed, "has no special flavour"; it must be admitted, on the contrary, that in the history of no literature is the greatest writer he who has fewest faults. No one therefore will be surprised, at the opening of this last chapter, in which I should like to sum up the work of Balzac—and assign him his place, as it appears to me, not only in the literature of the nineteenth century but in the history of French literature in general—if I first point out its imperfections, and, without intending to reproach him for them, but as a simple observer, say of this work that it is singularly "unequal" and "disproportionate".

It is disproportionate, because the representation it gives us of life is manifestly incomplete; and, for example, because out of a hundred works three narratives in all—*The Country Doctor*, *The Village Curé*, and *The Peasants*—devoted to "country life", certainly do not express the relative importance of our rural

population in the structure and organic working of our French society, even at the present time. These narratives are all three among Balzac's finest works, but they are not enough. Nor does the artisan appear, or he scarcely appears, in *The Human Comedy;* nor do the workmen in large manufactories, who, it is true, were not very numerous in Balzac's time, between 1830 and 1850; nor, especially, were they characterised by any very distinctive features; however, they existed, and one would wish that Balzac might have anticipated their coming importance, inasmuch as George Sand, between the years 1830 and 1850, plainly realised it. This is one aspect of the social question which seems to have escaped Balzac's observation. Again, I find but few barristers and professors in the stories of the great novelist, although, if I mistake not, the encroachment on public life by professors—Guizot, Cousin, Villemain, Jouffroy, Saint-Marc Girardin, Nisard—and by barristers—Berryer, the Dupins, Garnier-Pagès, Marie, Bethmont, Ledru-Rollin—was one of the characteristic features of the Government of July. But, to make up for this, do not men of business—notaries, attorneys, bankers, men who lend money on security for long or short terms, usurers, and bill-brokers—take up a little more space in

The Human Comedy than they held in the reality of that time? It must therefore be that Balzac, although he is "impersonal", has nevertheless put a little too much of himself and of the history of his life into his work. An instance of this may be pointed out in his David Séchard, at that passage in *Lost Illusions* in which he explains to us at some length the meaning of a "return statement of charges" in a bank, or at least what it meant at the time of the Restoration; moreover, nothing is more curious than to compare this with the "documents" published by MM. Hanotaux and Vicaire in their *Balzac the Printer*. Prostitutes and criminals that have been proved to be such are also very numerous in this Balzacian "society"!

All these remarks, and all others of the same kind that might be added, would have no interest, and I should not even think of making them, if any other novelist than Balzac were under consideration. They have a capital interest when they concern the man who wished to relate to us "the drama with three or four thousand characters which a society presents". Every artist is, so to speak, accountable to us for the manner in which he has fulfilled his intentions, and, from the point of view of pure criticism and of literary

history, it is indeed the only thing for which he is accountable to us. Balzac intended to give us a complete representation of the society of his time: we therefore have the right, we are even bound, to ask ourselves if he did so. Let us in addition recall that he himself was aware of the deficiencies, or at least of some of the deficiencies, in his work; and, especially as regards the social problem of education, this is disclosed to us by those four titles, or three at least of the four titles, which I have already noticed in connection with the programme of *The Human Comedy: The Children, A Young Ladies' Boarding-school, Inside Life at College,* and *A Study of Teachers.* If Balzac had written this "study", it would doubtless have been pathological.

Another defect in the ninety-seven works—novels or short stories—which constitute *The Human Comedy* is their amazing and disappointing inequality. The fault no doubt lies in Balzac's strange and furious methods of composition, and in the more than abnormal conditions of improvisation, haste, and excitement under which, as I have pointed out, he brought forth his work.

Take, for example, *A Woman of Thirty:* it is a story of about two hundred and fifty pages, which in its present form consists of six chap-

ters. The first of these chapters, bearing the title of *The Rendezvous* (*Le Rendez-vous*), had appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, in September and October, 1831, and the second, under the name of *Hidden Sufferings* (*Souffrances inconnues*), was not added until 1835, in the third edition of the *Scenes of Private Life*. But, before that, the third chapter, entitled *At Thirty* (*À trente Ans*), had appeared in the *Revue de Paris*, in April, 1832; the fourth, *The Hand of God* (*Le Doigt de Dieu*), likewise in the *Revue de Paris*, in March, 1831; the fifth, having as its title *The Two Meetings* (*Les deux Rencontres*), in January of the same year; and lastly, the sixth, *A Mother's Old Age* (*La Vieillesse d'une Mère*), also in the *Revue de Paris*, in 1832. What sort of unity can a story possess when it is composed in this way, under such chance conditions? And is it not wonderful, these things being so, that one of the first remembrances that the mere name of Balzac awakens in the memory—wrongly, however—is of *A Woman of Thirty?*

Let us now take *The Employees:* "Printed for the first time in *La Presse*, between the first and the fourteenth of July, 1837, under the title of *The Superior Woman*, this novel," M. de Lovenjoul informs us, "first appeared in book form at Werdet's, in two octavo volumes,

in October, 1838; it bore the same title, but the newspaper version contained also a conclusion, not republished, and the present dedication."* It appeared again, in 1846, in the first edition of *The Human Comedy*, and Balzac interpolated "some fragments of the *Physiology of the Employee* (*Physiologie de l'Employé*)". But he could not efface from it the traces of improvisation; and, while regretting this defect, we gain from it what perhaps nowhere else—not even in *Cousin Pons* or *The Peasants*—may be seen so clearly—how Balzac "prepared" his novels: a series of biographies or monographs, which are the description of the "varieties" of the same "social species"; dialogues in which these varieties try to manifest themselves in conformity with their natures; and the outline of a plot wherein, yielding to the suggestions of their concurring or opposing interests, the characters end by being "differentiated". It is not surprising, therefore, that *The Employees* is a novel which it is almost impossible to read; and it is only fitting to add that certain writers have no right to complain of this unreadability—I mean all those who have attempted to introduce the subject of government employment into the

* *History of Balzac's Works*, pp. 132–133.

novel, and who have found scarcely any traits by which to portray it other than those which Balzac had already sketched.

Such methods of composition explain the inequalities which unavoidably strike one in reading *The Human Comedy*. Balzac worked too fast; and it is all very well to say that "time has nothing to do with it"—that is a line of comedy which is untrue, even of a sonnet, and with still more reason of a novel. If Balzac wrote—and we know it by undoubted evidence—his *César Birotteau* in a fortnight, it is because he had already been carrying it in his mind, as I have said, for four or five years. And I also stated that he carried within himself, at the same time, the whole of his *Human Comedy*, but all the parts were not at the same stage of advancement at the same time, and the necessities caused by the mode of life which he had made for himself obliged him to detach and "realise" more than one fragment before the time to do so had really come. Such was the case with *The Peasants*.

Nor can the fact be concealed that, having conceived the ambition of making of his work a total representation of life, Balzac would really have been more than human if his genius had invariably been equal to his ambition. I have already pointed out that there was in him

a fund of vulgarity which was continually preventing him from expressing and portraying certain sentiments the full value of which he nevertheless realised, and whose delicacy attracted him. I do not wish to dwell upon *The Physiology of Marriage* and *The Petty Worries of Conjugal Life*, which, after all, are only the work of a shallow jester or a merry would-be cynic; but *The Lily of the Valley* or *Recollections of Two Young Brides!*—what strange ideas of platonic love and maternal love we should have to form if we were to see their ideal expression in the open declarations of Madame de Mortsauf or in the letters of Madame de Lestorade! *The Old Maid* is something still more unpleasant; and, on second thought, I was wrong before in reproaching Balzac for what pertains to caricature in its execution, if this is the only thing that saves his subject from being odious.

He did not like to be attacked on that point, which he felt or knew to be weak; and he answered reproaches of that sort with *Louis Lambert* and *Séraphita*. But the sense of mysticism is neither the sense of distinction nor the sense of refinement; and if it is, perhaps, "aristocratic", it is not so in the ordinary sense of that word. Exception in all things is always "a" distinction—it is not

"the" distinction; and one may be exceptional or unique in one's own way, as was Balzac, precisely without being any the less "vulgar" or the more "distinguished" on that account. Accordingly, it is not alone Balzac's jokes which are heavy, but also his gallant speeches; and that, again—in his *Recollections of Two Young Brides*—for instance, is nonsense which he gives us, coming from the pen of Madame de Macumer, for the hymn of triumphant love. The sentimental parts are weak, very weak, in *The Human Comedy*—as they are in Molière; but Molière was a writer of comedy, and nothing else!—and, of all human passions, the ones which this great painter of passions no doubt "represented" less well than others are the passions of love.

But what matters it? And even if there were still other deficiencies or faults to be pointed out in *The Human Comedy*, this is not the way—by debit and credit—to strike the balance of a great writer's account. It does not take long for posterity to forget the failings of a Balzac, to remember only his masterpieces, and to "realise" him in them—when he has left any. *Ars longa, vita brevis!* Life is so short, and art so difficult, that the last thing that is even expected of a "fine work" is to be a "perfect work"; and neither the

bloody excesses in the midst of which the action—which is no "action"—of *King Lear* unfolds itself nor the intolerable euphuisms placed by Shakespeare on the lips of Hamlet prevent *Hamlet* and *King Lear* from being the masterpieces that they are! Likewise, it is sufficient for Balzac's fame that he is the author of *Eugénie Grandet*, certain parts of *Old Goriot*, *The Quest of the Absolute*, *César Birotteau*, some pages of *The Lily of the Valley*, *A Bachelor's Establishment*, *A Dark Affair*, *Ursule Mirouet*, *The Muse of the Department*, *The Village Curé*, *An Inventor's Sufferings*, *Cousin Pons*, and *Cousin Bette*, to render it impossible for criticism, and no doubt for time, to make any impression on his work. We have it before us, just as the fifty years that have elapsed since the death of Balzac have made and, as it were, completed it! There it stands, detached from its origins and the circumstances of its production; freed, also, from the carpings of critics; its rank determined by the judgment of two generations! There it stands, a work of such a nature, however, that one may or may not like it—that is a matter of taste—but a work whose worth can no more be ignored than that of the man who left it to us! It remains for me to endeavour to tell what the real value of this

man is, and the place that he occupies in the history of French intellect.

As a writer Balzac is not of the "first rank", nor is he even one of those of whom it may be said that they received from heaven, at their birth, the gift of "style"; and, in this respect, no comparison is possible between him and some of his contemporaries—George Sand, for instance, or Victor Hugo. "While thinking well he often expresses himself badly," has been said of Molière. This might also be said of Balzac; and he also too often succeeds in expressing his thought only by means of "a multitude of metaphors which come very near being nonsense". This is because, like Molière, as I have just pointed out, he works rapidly; but, in addition to this, he revises his work; he corrects his novels on twelve or fifteen sets of proofs, one after the other; he adds, takes out, transposes, and superposes upon the first expression of his thought what seems to him to be "better style"; his "style" comes to him as an afterthought, as does his wit, because in a novel both wit and style are expected; and, as I have already said, just as in attempting to be witty he often fails to exhibit good taste, in like manner in attempting to display "style" he at times forgets the proper meanings of words,

and often the rules of grammar and the very laws of French syntax.

Does that mean that he "does not know how to write"? It has been seen how Taine exonerates him from this reproach; and, without conceding the truth of Taine's saying that Balzac "knew his own language . . . as well as any one can know it", or that his *Droll Stories* are a sufficient proof of it, the author of *The Human Comedy* is no doubt very different as a writer from the author of *The Mysteries of Paris*, for instance, or even—since in his day they seemed to delight in contrasting him with Mérimée—from the dry and pretentious author of *Carmen* and *Colomba*. How then does it happen that, even in our day, this reproach of writing badly recurs under the pen and especially on the lips of many readers who nevertheless like him; who believe that they have no biases on the question of style; and who no doubt thus express only their annoyance at being hampered in their reading of Balzac—of *Eugénie Grandet*, *César Birotteau*, and *Cousin Pons*—by something, they know not what, for which they cannot account, and which they ascribe, as one always does in such a case, to the imperfection of the writer?

One of the reasons for it is that Balzac him-

self—not single-handed, but together with a part of the opinion of his time—contributed more than any one towards deeply modifying the very idea of style; and this modification is not wholly sanctioned even yet.

Formerly people agreed as to what were the characteristics of a "well-written work", and whatever definition was given of style—for it might vary in different schools, and from one epoch to another, just as the definition of art has varied—it was a definition common to both criticism and authors. Therefore a work was well written when it was *correctly* written, that is to say, in conformity with the laws of grammar; *purely*, that is to say, with words whose meaning and shades of meaning had been fixed by town and court; and *clearly*, that is to say, by avoiding amphibologies and equivocations, and the unpleasant bringing together of words with the same sense or sound, a thing so difficult to avoid in French. If to these qualities others were added, they were qualities peculiar or personal to the writer: this one had the gift of conceiving images, that one the gift of imparting to his sentences the movement of his mind; one had wit, that is to say, a light and ambiguous way of saying things, and another saliency or colour, that is to say, in describing the object, the gift of mak-

ing one see it. But correctness, purity, and clearness always remained the sovereign qualities; and whoever did not possess them "wrote badly", or did "not know how to write". In this sense, on this ground, for all these reasons, it was understood that Regnard and Le Sage wrote better than Molière; the author of *Zaïre* and *Alzire* wrote better than the author of *Polyeuctus* (*Polyeucte*) and *The Cid* (*Le Cid*); Condorcet wrote better than Pascal, or as well. I say nothing of Saint-Simon, whose *Memoirs* caused a scandal when they appeared, in 1824—mutilated, too, as they were!—and which the classicists of that time received in the same way that some readers in our day still estimate Balzac's style.

But romanticism and especially Balzac have changed all that! To-day the prevailing question above all others is to know what a writer's purpose may be; and when, as with Balzac, it is not the "realisation of beauty" but the "representation of life", we fully understand that, in this particular case, we cannot demand of the copy qualities which are not in the model. Therefore what we must first ask ourselves is not whether Balzac's style is "correct" or whether it is "pure", but if it is "lifelike", or, rather, if it makes what it represents "live"; the rest is an entirely sub-

sidiary matter. Would any one say, on the strength of this, that George Sand "writes better" than Balzac? I am willing then, also, to concede it, and I began by saying it; but of all the characters whom we encounter in the novels of George Sand, do you know of one as "lifelike" as are Balzac's characters? That is the whole question! And the answer has become easy. If Balzac's style animates and vivifies, by I know not what means of his, all that he wishes to represent, he therefore accomplishes his object; and Balzac, to speak the truth, neither "writes badly" nor "writes well", but he writes "as he had to write"; and one cannot, in my opinion, without contradiction reproach him for "irregularities", for this is possibly the only condition under which his style can "live".

The only thing that can be said—from the point of view of the history of the French language—is that *The Human Comedy*, while contributing to modify deeply the previous idea of style, did not mark, and will not mark in the future, an epoch in the evolution of the language; and it is precisely in this that as a writer Balzac is not of the first rank. They who are writers of the first rank are those who, without disturbing the current of a language, or turning it from its time-honoured

course, modify that current; and who teach us to draw new tones from an instrument consecrated by tradition. Such was a Ronsard in the sixteenth century; a Pascal in the seventeenth; and, in the nineteenth century, a Chateaubriand or a Victor Hugo. How did they do it? What were the means which they employed? This is sometimes rather difficult to say, but especially it would take some time; and, even if I could, this is not the place for me to do it. But certainly their passage through literature leaves a deep trace in the history of a language, and after them one no longer writes as one did before they appeared. Balzac, evidently, does not belong to that family. He may, so to speak, have treated the language in his own way, and modified the notion of style by assigning to the art of writing an object entirely different from its real one; he has had no influence, properly speaking, on the art of writing, and his style as a writer has had no imitators. It lacked the "power" for this, or at least a certain degree of power, and especially "originality". His finest pages, which are not very numerous, or, rather, which it is not easy to detach and isolate from their context or framework, are beautiful, but not for and by reason of inimitable and unique qualities of style. One does not find displayed

in these pages that gift of verbal invention which is so characteristic of a natural genius for style. And, in order fully to assign to him his final place in the history of French prose, it will suffice to say, in conclusion, that all those qualities which are lacking in him—and for the absence of which I do not reproach him —are precisely the qualities of a Victor Hugo.

But if as a writer he is not of the first rank, perhaps I have a right to say, at the close of this study, that such is not at all his case as a novelist, and that no greater has been known in European literature. The day has forever gone by when it was believed that one could compare with him, as did Sainte-Beuve, the authors of *The Three Musketeers* (*Les trois Mousquetaires*) and *The Mysteries of Paris;* and, to speak of our contemporaries, I do not think that the authors of *Crime and Punishment* and *Anna Karenina*, who, besides, owe him so much, have surpassed him. From whatever point of view Balzac's novels are studied, and whether—as I have just donc—one tries to show what they contain and what is to be found in them alone, or, conversely, and as is oftener done, whether one attempts to recognise in *Eugénie Grandet* or in *César Birotteau*, in *A Bachelor's Establishment* or in *Cousin Bette*, qualities which are consid-

ered to be essential to any novel, their value is always the same, and nothing can be ranked above them. Add to this that it is these books which determined, as it were, the formula from which the novel deviated, later on, only to its very great detriment; and, in order to realise the value of such praise, consider that, in the same years when Balzac was producing his *Eugénie Grandet* and *The Country Doctor*, what the novelists who were his rivals brought forth were stories like *The Salamander* (*La Salamandre*), *The Two Corpses* (*Les deux Cadavres*), or *The Dead Ass and the Beheaded Woman* (*L'Ane mort et la Femme guillotinée*).

There is no higher fame, nor, I will say, any more lasting fame, for a great author than to have thus made himself, in a way, forever inseparable from the history of a literary form! But when, in addition, like a Balzac or a Molière, he has fixed the "models" of that form, he may without doubt be sure that he will live in the memory of men, and that no change in fashion or taste will prevail against his work.

For this reason I believe that for a long time to come Balzac will continue to be ranked as the master of the novel. Emancipation from the influence of *The Human Comedy* will take place only along the lines indicated or fore-

seen by Balzac; and when, perhaps, some day—just as happened in the case of Molière's successors—this influence shall be thought too tyrannical or too burdensome, the only way to shake it off will be to return to the observation and "representation of life"; and that will still be doing homage to Balzac. This is why I really do not see, in literature, in the nineteenth century, any influence comparable or superior to his. Hugo himself, of whom I spoke a moment ago, shares the sovereignty of lyric poetry with Lamartine, Musset, Vigny, and Leconte de Lisle. No dramatist, not even the elder Dumas, followed by his son, has been able to make himself master of the stage, or even to hold the preponderant place held by a Voltaire in the eighteenth century! But Balzac holds supreme power in the novel, not alone in France, but even abroad! And it may be said with truth that when we tire of reading him, of rereading and admiring him, it will no doubt be because the novel itself will have begun to grow tiresome. Such things have happened, and literary forms are not eternal. But even that would do no harm to Balzac's glory; and his fame, in literary history, will suffer no more by the death of the novel, if the novel is to die, than the fame of Racine suffered by the death of tragedy.

Need I say more? And ought I to assign Balzac a place among the philosophers, or, as we say to-day, the "thinkers" of his time? Even this I believe. Obviously, Balzac is not a philosopher as the expression is understood by those whom Schopenhauer called "professors of philosophy"—and these were Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling! He is, as I have shown, not a philosopher, in the sense that his absolutism, pessimism, and Catholicism do not together constitute a connected system, or even one very strongly reasoned out. But if the work of a great author necessarily expresses, whether he has so willed it or not, a conception of life, how can we doubt that the author of *The Human Comedy* had a philosophy? And how could I part from him without attempting to characterise it? Balzac's philosophy is his conception of life, and his conception of life consists in the two or three very general ideas of life which stand out most prominently in his work. Let me add that, in my eyes, "pessimism", and its opposite, "optimism", to which one always reverts when treating of such a subject, are not general ideas of life, but rather the refusal to have or express any ideas about life.

The most general idea of life that Balzac expressed is therefore this, that life is an

intricacy of causes and effects interconnected by "mutual dependences", or, if you like, and to use the current expression, by "a necessary solidarity". In the eyes of Balzac, the existence of a Rastignac or a De Marsay, of a Grandet or a Bridau, of a Crevel or a Gobseck, is not an isolated or spontaneous phenomenon which contains within itself the causes of its own development, but these existences are connected, or, rather, linked with other existences, and in such a way that the modifications they undergo, however slight, have vibrations *ad infinitum*, reaching to spheres where the names of Crevel and Gobseck, of Grandet and Bridau, of Rastignac and De Marsay, are not even known. Because young Chardon bethought himself, in Angoulême, of writing poetry in glorification of Madame de Bargeton, née de Négrepelisse d'Espard, consequences whose magnitude extended even to convicts in prison resulted therefrom; and because Baron Hulot needed a hundred thousand francs with which to furnish Madame Marneffe's apartment, hundreds of poor beggars of soldiers died in Algeria of starvation and despair. There is, moreover, a moral, and a very fine one, to be deduced from this connection of effects with causes; and the first item of it is that not one of our acts being a matter of indifference, no

one of them is insignificant, or ought, therefore, to be performed by us without due consideration. J. J. Rousseau somewhere supposes that a fictitious character is the heir of a very rich mandarin whom this character does not even know, and that by a single motion of his finger the heir could cause his death; and the author naturally concludes that strict integrity would forbid his making that motion. We do not need, alas! in order to "kill the mandarin", even to will it; all we have to do is to give free play to our selfish instincts!

But this solidarity is not confined to the round of social life, and it envelops the whole of humanity, which, doubtless, is not situated in nature "as an empire within an empire", according to the celebrated expression. Hence the analogies, if not the identity, of "natural history" with "social history"; and hence Balzac's æsthetics; but hence, also, the difference which distinguishes these æsthetics from all others, and makes of them at once a system of æsthetics and a conception or philosophy of life.

I need not point out the importance and especially the fecundity of this idea. Taine's criticism is wholly derived from it, as much as or more than from Hegel's logomachies; and its finest efflorescence in literature, after *The Human Comedy*, is, as far as I know, the work

of one who is perhaps the greatest English novelist of the nineteenth century: I mean the author of *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Middlemarch*. It is not my business to judge this work here, although I should have no difficulty whatever in doing so; and although, with a single restriction, I believe it to be a work of profound truth. If it were proved that social solidarity has its foundation in nature, it would not follow, on this account, that it has its laws in nature. But all I wish to establish is that this idea—that social solidarity has its foundation in nature—is the soul or innermost source of Balzac's work. It is also its light, and—since I have said, since it is admitted, that Balzac is not always clear—it is by means of this idea that one will end by understanding what he meant when, in his numerous prefaces, including the introduction to his *Human Comedy*, he laid emphasis on the close solidarity of the parts of his work. "All things causing and being caused, aiding and being aided, I hold that it is impossible to know the parts without knowing the whole, or the whole without knowing the parts." Balzac, who liked epigraphs, ought, indeed, to have used this as one at the beginning of his work.

Let us consider, further, the success this idea was to have, and, in fact, the success it has had

for the last fifty years. To-day we are all for "solidarity"; and perhaps, in speaking of it, one does not always know quite well what one means; but ideas need not be clear in order to be operative, and people always end by understanding one another. If, then, it is true that nobody in his day did more than Balzac to cause the spread of this idea, and in the best way, by suggestion and persuasion rather than by declaring or demonstrating it; if his *Human Comedy* is, as one might say, in a certain sense only the collection of the proofs of it and the living illustration thereof; if it is this idea, moreover, which for fifty years has helped us to see in Balzac a mind of a totally different character and range from those of the novelists who were still compared with him in 1850; and lastly, if the systems of the "philosophers" who were his contemporaries—the most illustrious of whom was named, I believe, Adolphe Garnier, whose masterpiece is a *Treatise on the Faculties of the Soul* (*Traité des Facultés de l'Ame*)—returned to obscurity; and if, on the other hand, it is the ideas of the novelist whom that philosopher would have styled a "simple entertainer" which were spreading and making disciples, being tested by discussion, and finally becoming one of the foundations of contemporary thought—one must be

resigned to it! Balzac has a right to the name of "philosopher" or "thinker"; and, in truth, I do not believe that any one would in our day venture to deny him the title.

He therefore appears to me, at the close of this study, to be one of the writers who, in France, in the nineteenth century, have exerted the deepest influence; and, viewed in our present perspective as regards him and his contemporaries, I see scarcely more than four or five whose influence may be said to rival his. There is Sainte-Beuve, there is Balzac, there is Victor Hugo; there is Auguste Comte, in a line of thought not so different from that in which Balzac's genius developed as one might at first believe; there are also, in such a list, there ought to be, two or three savants —Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire or Cuvier, Claude Bernard or Pasteur?—upon whom it is not my business to pass judgment, and whom, accordingly, I name only after a little hesitation. Men of science will some day tell us which of these four great men—unless, instead of any one of the four, they name a fifth —has brought about, in the conception that we form of the world, the most thorough and extensive revolution. I should hesitate less, were I an Englishman; and I should name Charles Darwin!

But, as far as we French are concerned—I repeat—I see none whose influence was more active than Balzac's, or is still more "actual" to-day, or which, by reason of its universal character, must doubtless be longer felt!

I express here no preferences; and, especially, I assign no ranks! I only make known. Each one of us, also, retains the right of preferring, if he chooses, the inspired poet of the *Meditations*, who is so natural—natural even to negligence—to the painstaking and laboured poet of *Les Orientales* and *Autumn Leaves* (*Feuilles d' Automne*). Again, how much more sincere is passion in Musset's *Nights* than in the love poetry of Hugo! And how much higher, nobler, and especially less commonplace are the thoughts of the great though not fully manifested poet of *The Ire of Samson* (*La Colère de Samson*) and *The Shepherd's House* than those of the marvellous creator of *The Legend of the Ages* (*La Légende des Siècles*)! There are still other currents or veins of which scarcely any trace can be found in the gigantic or cyclopean work of Hugo. The great master of romanticism did not, if I may so speak, "absorb" all his heretics—others might be mentioned outside of his influence who not only did not yield to it, but who even counteracted it. However, it remains none the less

true that, viewed in retrospect, no literary influence during the whole course of the century which has just closed has equalled his; that it is encountered everywhere—I mean, even in those very writers who have submitted to it most unwillingly; and that in the future, just as really as in the past, "romanticism" will be Victor Hugo.

At the other extremity of contemporary thought—and expression—Auguste Comte will be "positivism"—a philosopher as profound as the poet would be shallow, if the quality of verbal cleverness had not often, in Hugo, made up for the insufficiency of ideas. For words express ideas, although some of those who jingle them are not always fully aware of it; and one thinks just by "speaking", when one speaks like Hugo, with that sense of the depth of vocables which he possessed, and with that marvellous gift of drawing from them unknown resonances.

And now shall I say that "between" romanticism and positivism, or "above" them, Sainte-Beuve and Balzac, two inimical brothers whom "naturalism" reconciled, will perhaps stand for the best of the intellectual heritage which the nineteenth century has left us? This is a new way of conceiving man and life, freed from everything *a priori*, released from

all metaphysics; or, rather, it is a method complex and subtle as the very phenomena which it purposes to study, a concrete and positive method, a painstaking and patient method, the method, in brief, of which the *Port-Royal* of the one and *The Human Comedy* of the other are two monuments destined to last as long as the French language, or perhaps longer; and, finally, a method whose applications, becoming from day to day more extensive and exact, more numerous and searching, will accordingly, there is reason to believe, make us penetrate deeper every day, as was Balzac's hope, into the knowledge of man and of the laws of society.

FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A LIST OF AUTHORITIES ON BALZAC

The object of the present appendix is not to excuse the reader from referring to the capital book of Viscount Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, *History of Balzac's Works* (*Histoire des Œuvres de Balzac*); on the contrary, I would willingly say that his book might have exempted me from writing this appendix. But as that work contains no less than 496 octavo pages, half of which is in very small type, I thought that a short extract from it to complete this study would not be useless, especially because such an excerpt would allow the reader to check the book with greater ease.

I will divide it into three parts:

I. Sources to consult for the history of Balzac and his works.

II. Bibliography of the principal original or collective editions of Balzac's works.

III. Critical studies to consult on Balzac's works.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I

SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF BALZAC

First, Balzac himself, in his works, and notably in :

(*a*) *Louis Lambert* (*Louis Lambert*), for the recollections of his school-boy life at Vendôme;

(*b*) *The Wild Ass's Skin* (*La Peau de Chagrin*), for the recollections of his student life;

(*c*) *The Lily of the Valley* (*Le Lys dans la Vallée*), for the beginning of his liaison with Madame de Berny;

(*d*) *A Provincial Great Man in Paris* (*Un grand Homme de Province à Paris*), for his relations with publishers, newspapers, and fellow writers.

Now, that he may have described his own "poppy-red drawing-room" in *The Girl with the Golden Eyes* (*La Fille aux Yeux d'Or*); and his collections, in *Cousin Pons* (*Le Cousin Pons*); and that, according to Théophile Gautier's testimony, he drew his own portrait, about 1842, in *Albert Savarus* (*Albert Savarus*)—is quite credible. One may also believe that he remembered the Rue Visconti when he related, in *An Inventor's Sufferings* (*Les Souffrances de l'Inventeur*), the misfortunes and financial difficulties of David Séchard. But all such "documents", as I have already said, ought to be consulted very cautiously and used only with discretion; for the most "autobiographical" of them—which is *Louis Lambert* (*Louis Lambert*)—has nothing about it in the nature of a confession or even a disclosure; and the care to adapt facts to the requirements of the work, and to adapt details to the plan, as a whole, of the *Human Comedy* (*La Comédie humaine*), in Balzac always prevailed over his own recollections.

Other "documents" are more trustworthy; as, for example:

(*e*) His *Correspondence* (*Correspondance*), forming volume XXIV of the edition of his *Complete Works* (*Œuvres complètes*) (see p. 295);

(*f*) The two volumes of his *Letters to an Alien* (*Lettres à l'Étrangère*) (vol. I, Paris, 1899; and vol. II, Paris, 1906).

I ought, on the other hand, to call attention to the fact that, there being nothing of a "critical" nature in the editing of these three volumes of letters, they are still full of obscurities; and as I have said, furthermore, in the course of the present volume, since Balzac, in his *Letters to an Alien* (*Lettres à l'Étrangère*), had to assume an attitude which he found it difficult to maintain until the end, one will do well, as a rule, to believe him only after verification.

SECOND, *Balzac, his Life and Works, according to his Correspondence* (*Balzac, sa Vie et ses Œuvres, d'après sa Correspondance*), by Madame Laure Surville, née Balzac; Paris, 1858, Librairie Nouvelle.

The above biographical sketch, from the pen of his favourite sister, is reproduced at the head of the edition of his *Correspondence* (*Correspondance*) in volume XXIV of his *Complete Works* (*Œuvres complètes*).

THIRD, *History of Balzac's Works* (*Histoire des Œuvres de Balzac*), by Viscount de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul (Charles de Lovenjoul); third edition, entirely revised and corrected anew, Paris, 1888, Calmann-Lévy.

This book, as I have said, might alone take the place of all others; and I mention it here because, owing to the broad and precise manner in which M. de Lovenjoul has treated his subject, this *History of Balzac's Works* (*Histoire*

des Œuvres de Balzac) throws as much light on the biography of the man as it does on the bibliography of the writer.

FOURTH, *Honoré de Balzac* (*Honoré de Balzac*), by M. Edmond Biré; Paris, 1897, Champion. Interesting and important details on:

(*a*) *Balzac and the French Academy;*

(*b*) *Balzac and Napoleon;*

(*c*) *Balzac the Royalist;*

(*d*) *The Plays of Balzac;*

(*e*) *The Human Comedy on the Stage.*

FIFTH, *The Work of H. de Balzac* (*L'Œuvre de H. de Balzac*), a literary and philosophic study of *The Human Comedy* (*La Comédie humaine*), by M. Marcel Barrière; Paris, 1890, Calmann-Lévy.

An analysis of the work, or, more accurately, of the works, of Balzac, in accordance with the order in which they are arranged in the definitive edition of *The Human Comedy* (*La Comédie humaine*).

SIXTH, *Repertory of The Human Comedy of H. de Balzac* (*Répertoire de la Comédie humaine de H. de Balzac*), by MM. Anatole Cerfberr and Jules Christophe, with an introduction by M. Paul Bourget; Paris, 1893, Calmann-Lévy.

SEVENTH, *Balzac's Youth: Balzac the Printer* (*La Jeunesse de Balzac: Balzac Imprimeur*), 1823–1828, by MM. Gabriel Hanotaux and Georges Vicaire, with three engravings and two portraits; Paris, 1903, Librairie des Amateurs (A. Ferroud).

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A

ORIGINAL EDITIONS

1829

The Chouans (*Les Chouans*).

1830

At the Sign of the Cat and Racket (*La Maison du Chat-qui-pelote*)—*The Dance at Sceaux* (*Le Bal de Sceaux*)—*The Vendetta* (*La Vendetta*)—*A Double Family* (*Une double Famille*)—*The Peace of the Household* (*La Paix du Ménage*)—*Gobseck* (*Gobseck*)—*Sarrasine* (*Sarrasine*).

1831

The Wild Ass's Skin (*La Peau de Chagrin*)—*A Woman of Thirty* (*La Femme de trente Ans*) (chapters I, IV, and V).

1832

A Woman of Thirty (*La Femme de trente Ans*) (chapters III and VI)—*The Purse* (*La Bourse*)—*Madame Firmiani* (*Madame Firmiani*)—*A Study of Woman* (*Étude de Femme*)—*The Message* (*Le Message*)—*La Grenadière* (*La Grenadière*)—*The Forsaken Woman* (*La Femme abandonnée*)—*Colonel Chabert* (*Le Colonel Chabert*)—*The Vicar of Tours* (*Le Curé de Tours*)—*Louis Lambert* (*Louis Lambert*).

1833

Ferragus (*Ferragus*)—*The Duchess of Langeais* (*La Duchesse de Langeais*)—*The Country Doctor* (*Le Médecin de Campagne*).

1834

Eugénie Grandet (*Eugénie Grandet*)—*Gaudissart the Great* (*L'illustre Gaudissart*)—*The Girl with the Golden Eyes* (*La Fille aux Yeux d'Or*)—*The Quest of the Absolute* (*La Recherche de l'Absolu*).

1835

A Woman of Thirty (*La Femme de trente Ans*) (chapter II)—*Old Goriot* (*Le Père Goriot*)—*The Marriage Contract* (*Le Contrat de Mariage*)—*The Lily of the Valley* (*Le Lys dans la Vallée*)—*Séraphita* (*Séraphita*).

1836

The Atheist's Mass (*La Messe de l'Athée*)—*The Interdiction* (*L'Interdiction*)—*The Old Maid* (*La vieille Fille*)—*The Cabinet of Antiques* (*Le Cabinet des Antiques*), part one—*Facino Cane* (*Facino Cane*).

1837

Lost Illusions (*Illusions perdues*), part one: *The Two Poets* (*Les deux Poètes*)—*César Birotteau* (*César Birotteau*)—*The Superior Woman* (*La Femme supérieure*): later *The Employees* (*Les Employés*).

1838

The Cabinet of Antiques (*Le Cabinet des Antiques*), part two—*The House of Nucingen* (*La Maison Nucingen*)—*Splendours and Miseries of Courtesans* (*Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes*), part one.

1839

A Daughter of Eve (*Une Fille d'Ève*)—*Béatrix* (*Béatrix*), parts one and two—*Lost Illusions* (*Illusions perdues*), part two: *A Provincial Great Man in Paris* (*Un grand Homme de Province à Paris*)—*The Secrets of the Princess of*

Cadignan (*Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan*)—*The Village Curé* (*Le Curé de Village*).

1840

Pierrette (*Pierrette*)—*Pierre Grassou* (*Pierre Grassou*)—*A Prince of Bohemia* (*Un Prince de la Bohême*).

1841

The Pretended Mistress (*La fausse Maîtresse*)—*La Rabouilleuse* (*La Rabouilleuse*): later *A Bachelor's Establishment* (*Un Ménage de Garçon*)—*Ursule Mirouet* (*Ursule Mirouet*)—*A Dark Affair* (*Une ténébreuse Affaire*).

1842

Recollections of Two Young Brides (*Mémoires de deux jeunes Mariées*)—*A Start in Life* (*Un Début dans la Vie*)—*Albert Savarus* (*Albert Savarus*).

1843

Honorine (*Honorine*)—*The Muse of the Department* (*La Muse du Departement*)—*Lost Illusions* (*Illusions perdues*), part three: *An Inventor's Sufferings* (*Les Souffrances de l'Inventeur*)—*Splendours and Miseries of Courtesans* (*Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes*), part two.

1844

Modeste Mignon (*Modeste Mignon*)—*Madame de la Chanterie* (*Madame de la Chanterie*): later *The Seamy Side of Contemporary History* (*L'Envers de l'Histoire contemporaine*)—*The Peasants* (*Les Paysans*), part one.

1845

A Business Man (*Un Homme d'Affaires*).

1846

Splendours and Miseries of Courtesans (*Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes*), part three—*Cousin Bette* (*La Cousine Bette*)—*The Involuntary Comedians* (*Les Comédiens sans le savoir*).

1847

The Last Incarnation of Vautrin (*La dernière Incarnation de Vautrin*)—*Cousin Pons* (*Le Cousin Pons*)—*The Deputy of Arcis* (*Le Député d'Arcis*).

1854

The Petty Bourgeois (*Les petits Bourgeois*).

It should be pointed out, in regard to this last title and date, that three of Balzac's great novels, *The Peasants* (*Les Paysans*), *The Deputy of Arcis* (*Le Député d'Arcis*), and *The Petty Bourgeois* (*Les petits Bourgeois*), were not finished by Balzac.

B

COLLECTIVE EDITIONS

First, *Scenes of Private Life* (*Scènes de la Vie privée*), two octavo vols., 1830, Mame and Delaunay-Vallée.

Second, *Novels and Philosophic Stories* (*Romans et Contes philosophiques*), three octavo vols., 1831, Gosselin.

Third, *Scenes of Private Life* (*Scènes de la Vie privée*), four octavo vols., 1832, Mame and Delaunay-Vallée.

Fourth, *Novels and Philosophic Stories* (*Romans et Contes philosophiques*), four octavo vols., 1833, Gosselin.

Fifth, *Studies of Manners in the Nineteenth Century* (*Études de Mœurs au XIX^e^ Siècle*), twelve octavo

vols., 1834–1837, Veuve Béchet and Werdet, containing: (1) *Scenes of Private Life* (*Scènes de la Vie privée*), vols. I to IV, 1834–1835; (2) *Scenes of Provincial Life* (*Scènes de la Vie de Province*), vols. V to VIII, 1834–1837; (3) *Scenes of Parisian Life* (*Scènes de la Vie parisienne*), vols. IX to XII, 1834–1835.

SIXTH, *The Human Comedy* (*La Comédie humaine*), first edition, sixteen octavo vols., 1842–1846, Furne, Dubochet, and Hetzel.

SEVENTH, *Balzac's Works* (*Œuvres de Balzac*), twenty octavo vols., 1855, Veuve Houssiaux.

EIGHTH, *Complete Works of H. de Balzac* (*Œuvres complètes de H. de Balzac*), twenty-four octavo vols., 1869–1870, Calmann-Lévy, containing: (1) *The Human Comedy* (*La Comédie humaine*), vols. I to XVII; (2) *Complete Plays of Balzac* (*Théâtre complet de Balzac*), vol. XVIII; (3) *Droll Stories* (*Contes drôlatiques*), vol. XIX; (4) Various works of Balzac, not yet published, or, more correctly, not yet collected, vols. XX to XXIII; (5) *Correspondence* (*Correspondance*), vol. XXIV.

I think I ought to call attention, as offering the greatest interest for the history of the development of Balzac's genius—and I myself, in another work, conceived on a more extensive plan, might have attempted to turn it to account—to the *Analytic Studies* (*Études analytiques*), the *Parisian Sketches* (*Esquisses parisiennes*), and the *Prefaces and Notes Relative to the First Editions* (*Préfaces et Notes relatives aux premières Éditions*), contained in the first three volumes of the "various works" of this edition.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

III

CRITICAL STUDIES TO CONSULT ON BALZAC

A complete list of them—up to 1888—will be found in the third edition of the book by M. de Lovenjoul. I here confine myself to mentioning those which have appeared "only since the death of Balzac"; and, among these studies themselves, not all the interesting ones, but only those which are, so to speak, inseparable from the discussion of Balzac's work:

First, Sainte-Beuve, *M. de Balzac*, September second, 1850, *Monday Chats* (*Causeries du Lundi*), vol. II.

One may refer to the first article by Sainte-Beuve on *H. de Balzac*, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of September fifteenth, 1834, and to the appendix of the first volume of his *Port-Royal*, sixth edition, vol. I, page 548.

Second, George Sand, *Honoré de Balzac* (*Honoré de Balzac*), printed for the first time in a volume by Madame Sand entitled *Around the Table* (*Autour de la Table*), Paris, 1875, Calmann-Lévy, but dated 1853 by M. de Lovenjoul; it may be anterior to that date.

One reads in one of the *Letters to an Alien* (*Lettres à l'Étrangère*), vol. II, page 32, bearing the date of April fifteenth, 1842: "In the *Revue Indépendante*, edited by George Sand, there crept in, unknown to her, a frightful article which won me a four-page letter from her, in which she apologised for her carelessness. I went to see her, to explain to her how such injustices serve talent, and as she had told me that she wanted to write an adequate book about me, I tried to dissuade her by telling her that she would bring herself into terrible odium. She persisted, and then I asked her to write the preface to *The Human Comedy* (*La Comédie humaine*), allowing her time to make up her mind. I went to see her again, and, after having fully considered

the matter, she agreed to do it, and is going to write a complete estimate of my works, my undertaking, my life and character, which will be an answer to all the malignant attacks to which I have been subjected. *She wants to vindicate me.*" Is not this an admirable way of understanding and practising the art of puffing?

Did George Sand carry out her generous intention? It would be difficult to say, and also whether the article was published before Balzac's death. But the heirs or the editors did not absolve her from her promise; and in 1853, when the first edition of *Balzac's Works* * was being prepared at Houssiaux's, she was asked, it is said, for the preface, and this preface is no other, it is further said, than the sketch to which I have called attention. There would only remain, in that case, a slight enigma to solve, which would be to know why this sketch does not appear at the head of the Houssiaux edition.

To this sketch ought to be added a few pages on Balzac by the same George Sand, in volume IV of the *History of my Life* (*Histoire de ma Vie*).

THIRD, Théophile Gautier, *Honoré de Balzac*, in *L'Artiste*, 1858, also reprinted in a duodecimo volume, 1859, Poulet-Malassis.

FOURTH, Taine, *Balzac*, in the *Journal des Débats*, 1858, and in *New Essays in Criticism and History* (*Nouveaux Essais de Critique et d'Histoire*), Paris, 1865, Hachette.

FIFTH, Émile Zola, (*a*) *The Experimental Novel* (*Le Roman expérimental*), 1880; (*b*) *The Naturalistic Novelists* (*Les Romanciers naturalistes*), 1881.

SIXTH, André Le Breton, *Balzac, the Man and his Work* (*Balzac, l'Homme et l'Œuvre*), Paris, 1905, Armand Colin.

F. B.

* See above : Collective Editions, Seventh.

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